

BEN-HADAD'S INVASION AND DEFEAT

BIBLE TEXT : I Kings 20:1-43

LESSON 299 **Senior Course**

MEMORY VERSE: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

1 Kings 20:1-43

¹ And Benhadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and *there were* thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it.

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

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

⁴ And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I *am* thine, and all that I have.

⁵ And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Benhadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children;

⁶ Yet I will send my servants unto thee to morrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be, *that* whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put *it* in their hand, and take *it* away.

⁷ Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this *man* seeketh mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold; and I denied him not.

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

⁹ Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Benhadad, Tell my lord the king, All that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first I will do: but this thing I may not do.

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Siege of Samaria

1. Ben-hadad and 32 kings besieged Samaria and warred against it, I Kings 20:1.
2. A message was sent to Ahab demanding his most prized possessions, I Kings 20:2, 3.
3. The king of Israel agreed to the demands, I Kings 20:4.
4. The second message came stating even more rigid conditions, I Kings 20:5, 6.
5. The terms of the second message were turned down by Ahab and the elders of Israel, I Kings 20:7-9.

II The Battle

1. Ben-hadad boasted of his might and power, but Ahab parried the boast with an apt proverb, I Kings 20:10, 11.
2. The Syrian army was set in array, I Kings 20:12.
3. Israel's army was led by young men of the princes of the provinces with Ahab ordering the battle, I Kings 20:13-19.
4. The men of Israel slew every one his man, throwing the Syrian army into rout, I Kings 20:20, 21.
5. The prophet warned Ahab that the Syrians would return, I Kings 20:22.
6. To show His omnipotence, God delivered the second Syrian army into Israel's hands, I Kings 20:23-30.

III Ahab's Indiscretion

1. The defeated Ben-hadad sent to Ahab for conditions of peace, I Kings 20:31, 32.
2. Ahab called for Ben-hadad and made a covenant with him, I Kings 20:33, 34; I Samuel 15:3, 8, 9.
3. A prophet disguised himself and put the word of the Lord before Ahab in the form of a parable, I Kings 20:35-40.
4. Ahab pronounced his own judgment, I Kings 20:40-43.

NOTES:

A Picture of Life

In the account of the dealings and wars between Ahab king of Israel, and Ben-hadad King of Syria, can be seen a true picture of life. Ahab lived 900 years before Christ, yet the attitude that he manifested toward God was not much different from the attitude that can be found in the average person of the world today. Ahab had been king over Israel for about 18 years before Ben-hadad invaded the land, and all these years had been spent in reckless sin and idolatry. The king could not have sinned ignorantly, because he ruled over the Children of Israel, God's chosen people, and God was faithful to warn the king in many ways of the terrible retribution and judgment that would result from his sins. But the king persisted in his evil way. Perhaps he thought the price of sin would not be so great as the prophets foretold.

The day came when Ahab's sins overtook him. God used Ben-hadad as an instrument to bring Ahab to a reckoning. The city Samaria was surrounded by a vast multitude of soldiers, horses,

And the messengers departed, and brought him word again.

¹⁰ And Benhadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.

¹¹ And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell *him*, Let not him that girdeth on *his harness* boast himself as he that putteth it off.

¹² And it came to pass, when *Benhadad* heard this message, as he *was* drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants, Set *yourselves in array*. And they set *themselves in array* against the city.

¹³ And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD.

¹⁴ And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the LORD, *Even* by the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, Thou.

¹⁵ Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty two: and after them he numbered all the people, *even* all the children of Israel, *being* seven thousand.

¹⁶ And they went out at noon. But Benhadad *was* drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him.

¹⁷ And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Benhadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria.

¹⁸ And he said, Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive.

and chariots — the combined armies and equipment of the 32 kings who were allied with Ben-hadad in this venture. Ben-hadad sent a message to Samaria, stating the price of peace; and, though the price seemed very high, Ahab answered that he would meet the conditions. There was not much else that Ahab could do, for the small army inside Samaria did not have a chance to break through the siege without some outside help. Ahab was in no spiritual condition to call upon God for help, and Baal could not help. Ahab had served sin, and now he must try to meet the obligations of that sinful life.

Sin's Harvest

God is faithful to every soul. The people who go into sin do so in violation of their conscience and the voice of God that would lead them to the paths of righteousness. There is an inherent nature in the heart of man that persuades him of a judgment day coming. Nearly everyone will agree that the man who sows wildly to sin must expect a terrible harvest from that sin at some later date, especially if the man does not change from his sinful ways. Many sinners, however, have been duped by the devil into thinking that they can enjoy a certain period of sin, no matter how vile, and then can turn from the grosser sins and escapes most of sin's penalties. Sin will make some demands and require a certain price, the sinner knows, but he thinks that these can be paid for as he goes along. He is willing to pay the lesser price, but he fervently hopes that the main principal of his wicked investment will never come up for a reckoning. No wonder God has said, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

Not Content

Ben-hadad was not satisfied even when Ahab was willing to grant the first request. Ahab had promised, "I am thine, and all that I have" -- wives, children, gold, and silver. The second message demanded that the city of Samaria be laid wide open to Ben-hadad's servants, that they might take anything that was pleasant to their eyes. That demand was too much for Ahab and the elders of Israel; for they would die rather than submit to such humiliation. Strange, though, that Ahab would take such a stand against the King of Syria after promising him all his possessions. Ahab, like multitudes of modern people, possibly thought that he could pay off with a promissory note, but he drew the line when Ben-hadad made the matter clear that he would collect on the promise.

In similar manner, many sinners have found that the devil is not content to let them go a little way into sin and no farther. The devil is a relentless taskmaster, driving his charges farther and farther into sin. Sin demands an extremely high price; and, though the sinner thinks in his heart that he will pay the price of sinful living, the time comes when the average person draws the line and says that he will go no farther. But, as Ahab found, the sinner finds that he is ruled by a force far greater than his own. There is no hope for deliverance, from a human standpoint.

Outside Help

Ahab could have boasted that he would not yield to Ben-hadad's demands; but it would be only a matter of time until the power of the Syrian army would have broken down the walls of Samaria, or the force of the siege would have reduced the inhabitants of the city to such a state of famine that further resistance would have been impossible. Without outside help Samaria and Ahab were doomed, but there was outside help for Ahab! That help came from an entirely different source than he

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

²⁰ And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued them: and Benhadad the king of Syria escaped on an horse with the horsemen.

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

²² And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee.

²³ And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods *are* gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.

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

²⁵ And number thee an army, like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, *and* surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so.

²⁶ And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Benhadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel.

²⁷ And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, and went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids; but the Syrians filled the country.

²⁸ And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD *is* God of the hills, but he *is*

had any right to expect — that help came from God. Ahab did not pray, but there must have been in the city a few righteous people who prayed. Abraham's intercession for Sodom secured God's promise to spare that city if only ten righteous people could have been found therein. Ahab was greatly surprised, and well he should have been, when the prophet came with the message that God would deliver the city. God is under no obligation to help the wicked man, especially the one who has turned as Ahab did from so clear a pathway of duty and light. The prophet outlined the plan of battle that Ahab should follow, and God brought the victory just as He promised. Oh, the mercy of our God, that He would give such a mighty deliverance to so wicked a king as Ahab!

There is outside help for the sinner, too! Though he be ever so wicked, though his plight seem so hopeless, though there be no power within himself to break the chains of sin, God has provided a rescue from sin. "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:24, 25). "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: . . . whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:34, 43). Jesus Christ our Lord came to this earth, lived, died, and arose from the grave, that the sinner might be delivered from the prison-house of sin and be received into the Kingdom of Heaven. Ahab escaped defeat, through another's prayers, perhaps; but the sinner must do his own praying, if he expects to receive salvation. All may come to the Lord — no one is barred; but all must come in the same way: through faith in Jesus Christ, through repentance for all sins committed, and through obedience to the Word of God as the light is unfolded and revealed to sinners. Behold the goodness of God! The most wicked man has just as much right to come for deliverance as the moral man. The man who realizes that his case is hopeless and lost, from the human standpoint, will find deliverance when he comes to God.

Deliverance

"Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee" (I Kings 20:22). The prophet came to Ahab the second time with this word of warning. God had given the people a mighty deliverance from their enemies; but He informed them, too, that the enemy would return at the same time the following year. God's Word is true. The Syrian king gathered the armies together, putting captains of war at the heads of the armies instead of kings as in the former battle. The Syrians determined to fight the Children of Israel on the open plain in this war, for they concluded that Israel's God was the god of the hills and not a god of the valleys. With great boldness the Syrians came against Israel. Their army filled the country, while the army of Israelites was pitched before them "like two little flocks of kids"; but armies and numbers of men mean nothing to our God. God gave the victory to Israel to prove to the idolatrous Syrians that Israel's God was and is all-powerful, and that he fills the whole creation.

The Christian's life follows the picture here to a great extent. God calls the sinner from a terrible life and gives him a remarkable deliverance in that every sinful habit and appetite has been broken. The man is a new creature in Christ Jesus, and a new life is manifested; but God warns that man to walk in the

not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD.

²⁹ And they pitched one over against the other seven days. And *so* it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day.

³⁰ But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and *there* a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men *that were* left. And Benhadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber.

³¹ And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel *are* merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life.

³² So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and *put* ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Benhadad saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, *Is* he yet alive? he *is* my brother.

³³ Now the men did diligently observe whether *any thing would come* from him, and did hastily catch *it*: and they said, Thy brother Benhadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Benhadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot.

³⁴ And *Benhadad* said unto him, The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then *said Ahab*, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away.

³⁵ And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the LORD, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man

light of His Word, to be strong in the Lord, and to put on the whole armour of God; for there is sure to be a testing time. The enemy of the soul, the devil, will return to test and challenge the Christian's faith and foundation. If the Christian is faithful to God, there is not a chance that the enemy will obtain a victory, because "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4). Again, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Corinthians 10:13).

Satan's Promises

Marvellous victory was given to Ahab and the Children of Israel over the Syrian armies twice in succession. Ahab should have known by that time that God had a controversy with the Syrians, even though Ben-hadad had escaped death and remained alive. Ben-hadad sent to Ahab for mercy, not knowing how the message would be received; but Ahab welcomed the news of Ben-hadad's escape and called him "brother." A meeting was arranged between the two kings, which resulted in a covenant, with Ben-hadad returning to Syria in peace. He promised Ahab, "The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria." How subtle the devil! Ahab could have marched right into Syria and taken the whole land, but he covenanted, instead, for a little promise.

The devil tempts the heart of every Christian with great promises if only the man will turn from God and serve Satan; but every promise of worldly grandeur or temporal gain or fame that the devil gives is an empty one. The devil promises all and gives nothing but sorrow, while God promises much and gives more than the heart can ever imagine. Oh, the foolishness of men who listen to sin's promises and settle for the paltry, fading, vanishing, temporal treasures! God has given the Christian real victory and the promise of eternal life and eternal treasures to come. Could anything be mentioned that could compare in value? Nothing, absolutely nothing!

Destiny

A prophet came to Ahab the third time, but there was no message of encouragement or peace this time. God placed a parable before the king in such a way that it was his duty to decide the proper answer. Quickly the king answered, "So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it." The prophet removed his disguise, much to the king's consternation, and said: "Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people."

God has created man a free moral agent. The man who chooses to serve God, believing and obeying Christ as his personal Saviour, will enter into Heaven at the end of his faithful life; but the man who rejects the cry of his soul, choosing the ways of the world and sin, serving the devil, will be cast into hell at the end of time. Choose rightly! "So shall thy judgment be; thyself has decided it."

QUESTIONS

1. What message did Ben-hadad send to Ahab?
2. Was Ben-hadad content with the answer that Ahab sent?
3. What did Ahab and the elders of Israel decide about the second message?

refused to smite him.

³⁶ Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him.

³⁷ Then he found another man, and said, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded *him*.

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

³⁹ And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver.

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*.

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

⁴² And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of *thy* hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.

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

4. Who was the victor in the battle? Why?
5. Why did the prophet come to Ahab the second time?
6. How did Ahab treat Ben-hadad, the captive?
7. Why did Ahab's actions displease God?
8. How did God inform Ahab that he had done wrong?