

NOON BIBLE STUDY: 1 KINGS 20

MAIN CHARACTERS:

- AHAB, KING OF ISRAEL, HUSBAND OF JEZEBEL, IDOLATROUS KING
- BEN-HADAD, KING OF ARAM (SYRIA). GENTILE, PAGAN, NORTHERN NEIGHBOR
- ARAM IS ALSO KNOWN AS "SYRIA" (ESV, KJV)

1 KINGS 20:1-9 — AHAB'S WAR WITH ARAM

KING BEN-HADAD OF ARAM (SYRIA) COMES TO THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL AND INTIMIDATES AHAB INTO BECOMING SUBSERVIENT TO ARAM. HE DEMANDS AUTHORITY OVER AHAB'S "SILVER AND GOLD, MOST BEAUTIFUL WIVES AND CHILDREN" (V. 3). AHAB AGREES WITHOUT A FIGHT (V. 4). THEN BEN-HADAD RESPONDS BY DEMANDING ACCESS TO AHAB AND HIS ADVISOR'S HOMES TO SEARCH FOR ANYTHING ADDITIONALLY VALUABLE (V. 5-6). AHAB CALLS THE ELDERS OF THE LAND TOGETHER AND THEY REJECT THIS REQUEST. AHAB IS FORCED TO SEND A NEW REPLY TO BEN-HADAD INDICATING HE WILL AGREE TO HIS FIRST REQUEST, BUT NOT HIS SECOND (V. 9).

1 KINGS 20:10-12 - KING BEN-HADAD'S RESPONSE: IT'S TIME FOR WAR

KING BEN-HADAD IS NOT HAPPY WITH AHAB'S RESPONSE AND WILL NOW PREPARE HIMSELF FOR WAR WITH ISRAEL. HE IS PRETTY CONFIDENT IN HIS CHANCES:

1 KINGS 20:10 (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 20:13-14 - AHAB PROMISED VICTORY

A PROPHET APPEARS BEFORE AHAB TO TELL HIM THAT THE LORD IS GOING TO ASSIST ISRAEL AGAINST ARAM.

IT IS INTERESTING THAT WE ARE INTRODUCED TO AN UNNAMED PROPHET AT THIS POINT IN 1 KINGS. REMEMBER ONE OF THE COMPLAINTS OF ELIJAH IN 1 KINGS 19 WAS THAT HE ALONE WAS LEFT AS A PROPHET AND WORSHIPPER OF THE LORD. IN THE FOLLOWING CHAPTER WE FIND AN ADDITIONAL PROPHET WHO IS SPEAKING ON THE LORD'S BEHALF. GOD'S NOT LIMITED TO OUR ABILITIES OR BOXED IN BY OUR PERSPECTIVES ON LIFE.

ONE OF THE MAJOR THEMES OF THIS CHAPTER IS THE LORD'S REPUTATION. GOD IS CONCERNED ABOUT HIS OWN REPUTATION ON THE EARTH, SOMETIMES IN SPITE OF THE PEOPLE HE HAS CALLED TO BE HIS OWN. IN THIS CASE, ISRAEL IS NOT WORSHIPPING HIM, BUT HE WOULD RATHER AID AHAB AGAINST ARAM THAN HAVE BEN-HADAD THINK THAT A MILITARY VICTORY BY ARAM IMPLIES THAT THE ARAMEAN GODS ARE GREATER THAN THE (SUPPOSED) GOD OF ISRAEL.



THE PROPHET TELLS AHAB THAT THIS VICTORY'S AIM WILL BE "AND YOU SHALL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD." REMEMBER, WE ARE DEALING WITH AN ISRAELITE KING (AHAB) WHO CLEARLY KNOWS HE IS OUTMATCHED. (HE TURNS HIS SILVER, GOLD, WIFE AND CHILDREN OVER WITH NO MORE THAN A LETTER FROM BEN-HADAD!). SO IF VICTORY COMES, HE WOULD KNOW IT IS FROM A SOURCE OTHER THAN HIMSELF. IN FACT, THE PROPHET EVEN TELLS HIM THAT HE WILL ATTACK FIRST, AND DO SO WITH YOUNG (AND LIKELY UNTRAINED) MEN! (V. 14) AND SIMILAR TO ELIJAH'S PROPHECY ABOUT LACK OF RAIN, THIS PROPHET TELLS AHAB AHEAD OF TIME WHAT WILL HAPPEN, SO THE KING WILL KNOW IT IS CERTAINLY NOT A COINCIDENCE.

"ALL THIS HELP - THE PROMISE, THE DIRECTION, THE WARNING - IS PURELY YAHWEH'S GIFT. AHAB NEVER SEEKS A LICK OF IT: IT IS GOD-INITIATED AND PROPHET IMPOSED. AND UTTERLY BAFFLING"

"YOU SHALL KNOW THAT I AM YAHWEH' MEAN: WHEN I DO WHAT I HAVE PREDICTED, THEN YOU WILL HAVE CLEAR EVIDENCE THAT I, YAHWEH (AND NO OTHER), HAVE ACTED, IN GRACE OF JUDGMENT AS THE CASE MAY BE, AND THAT YOU ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR RESPONDING APPROPRIATELY. IN THE VICTORIES OVER ARAM, AHAB AND ISRAEL ARE TO SEE THAT YAHWEH IS THERE IN SAVING HELP, UNMASKED AND UNDESERVED - AND THAT BOTH KING AND PEOPLE SHOULD ACKNOWLEDGE AND ADORE. IF THE LORD HAS BEEN ON SITE, DARE WE YAWN AND GO ON AS BEFORE?" - DALE RALPH DAVIS ("FOCUS ON THE BIBLE: 1 KINGS" PAGE 283, 284)

WE SHALL SEE HOW THE EVIL KING AND HIS NATION WILL RESPOND.

1 KINGS 20:15-21 - VICTORY FOR ISRAEL

SURE ENOUGH, ISRAEL DEFEATS ARAM.

V. 18 - "TAKE THEM ALIVE OR ALIVE!" - PERHAPS THE ALCOHOL TALKING?

1 KINGS 20:22 - VICTORY WILL BE SHORT LIVED, AHAB MUST PREPARE HIMSELF FOR A NEW BATTLE ONCE SPRING RETURNS.

A KING WITH THE BOASTING OF BEN-HADAD WOULD SURELY NOT BE CONTENT AFTER HIS LOPSIDED LOSS TO ISRAEL. HE WAS PRIDEFUL AND RECKLESS (EX: V. 16 - DRINKING HIMSELF DRUNK) AND WILL NOW REGROUP TO SEEK REVENGE. HE GATHERS HIS ADVISORS TO ASSESS WHAT WENT WRONG..

1 KINGS 20:23-28 - THE LORD IS A GOD OF MOUNTAINS & VALLEYS

IN THE NATION'S HISTORY, THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR ISRAEL AT MOUNTAINS (HOREB, JERUSALEM, JOSHUA/MOSES, MT CARMEL). AS A RESULT, THE MILITARY ADVISORS OF ARAM ASSUME THAT YAHWEH MUST BE SOME SORT OF MOUNTAIN-RELATED DEITY. AS WE HAVE LEARNED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS, THIS WAS THE WAY THE IDOLS OF CANAAN WORKED. THERE WAS A RAIN GOD, A FERTILITY GOD, A GOD OF DEATH, AND SO ON. SO NATURALLY, THE NATIONAL-GOD OF ISRAEL MUST BE THE MOUNTAIN GOD. AND SO THEY PROCEED THINKING THAT THIS MOUNTAIN GOD COULD NOT HELP THEM IF THE BATTLE TOOK PLACE IN A VALLEY.

AND AGAIN THE LORD STEPS IN TO DEFEND HIS OWN REPUTATION. IN SPITE OF THE WICKEDNESS OF ISRAEL AND IT'S KING, THE LORD WANTS TO ENSURE THAT NO PAGAN RULER GETS BY THINKING THAT THE LORD LACKS STRENGTH OR IS LIMITED. SO GOD WILL USE AHAB AND HIS ARMY TO TEACH ARAM WHAT KIND OF GOD THE LORD REALLY IS.

1 KINGS 20:29-30, 31-34 - ARAM SOUNDLY DEFEATED AGAIN. BEN-HADAD BEGS FOR MERCY

UPON HEARING THAT BEN-HADAD IS DEFEATED, AND SEEING THE VISIBLE SIGNS OF CONTRITION AND SURRENDER BY ARAM, AHAB SHOWS "MERCY". HOWEVER, THIS "MERCY" IS REALLY POLITICAL POSITIONING. AHAB SPARES THE ARAMEAN KING AND CALLS HIM "MY BROTHER". YUCK. IN VERSE 34 THEY HAVE A CHARIOT SUMMIT TO SORT OUT THE DETAILS OF THEIR NEW RELATIONSHIP.

1 KINGS 20:35-43 - GOD GETS WHAT BELONGS TO HIM

THE LORD SENDS ANOTHER PROPHET (THROUGH AN UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCE) TO REBUKE KING AHAB, WHO HAS NOW TAKEN THE LORD'S GLORY FOR HIMSELF. THIS ISN'T GOING TO WORK. THE PROPHET USES A LIVING PARABLE TO PRONOUNCE JUDGMENT UPON AHAB AND THE NATION OF ISRAEL. AHAB SHOULD NOT HAVE BECOME BROTHERS WITH THE PAGAN KING, HE SHOULD HAVE EXECUTED HIM. (CP. DEUTERONOMY 20:10-18, ETC).

ONCE AHAB HAD GOTTEN VICTORY FROM GOD'S HAND, HE THEN RETURNED TO TRUSTING IN HIMSELF. GOD HAD DONE SOMETHING FOR AHAB THAT AHAB COULD NOT DO HIMSELF - BUT RATHER THAN ALLOWING THAT GREAT GRACE TO TRANSFORM HIM AND LEAD HIM TO DEPEND ON THE LORD IN THE FUTURE, HE TAKES MATTERS BACK INTO HIS OWN HANDS IN HIS DEALINGS WITH BEN-HADAD. HE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE VICTORY GOD HAD GIVEN HIM BUT NEVER TURNED TO THE LORD. AS A RESULT OF THIS, BEN-HADAD REMAINS ALIVE, ARAM IS STILL RELEVANT AND IN 1 KINGS 22 WE WILL LEARN THAT IT IS IN A FUTURE BATTLE AGAINST ARAM THAT AHAB WILL BE KILLED.

WE TOO CAN LEARN FROM THIS FOOLISHNESS. THERE ARE MANY WHO CRY OUT TO THE LORD FOR HELP, DELIVERANCE OR SALVATION. HE COMES IN AND BRINGS VICTORY OR HEALING THAT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE OTHERWISE. THEN WE RETURN TO WHOLENESS OR ARE FREE FROM TROUBLE, AND RATHER THAN BEING GRATEFUL AND RECOGNIZING THE LORD'S MERCY UPON US, WE GO BACK TO BEING KINGS AND QUEENS OF OUR OWN KINGDOMS. IT REMINDS ME OF THE STORY JESUS TOLD ABOUT THE MAN FORGIVEN OF MILLIONS, WHO THEN IMPRISONS HIS FELLOW SERVANT WHO OWED HIM \$100 (MATTHEW 18:23-35).

AS FOR THE PROPHET NOT WANTING TO PUNCH THE OTHER PROPHET - IT IS A LITERAL PERSONIFICATION OF THE VERY POINT AHAB (AND WE) NEEDED TO LEARN. IT SOUNDED ABSURD FOR THE PROPHET TO PUNCH THE OTHER PROPHET - BUT IT WAS THE WORD OF THE LORD. IT MIGHT HAVE MADE MORE "SENSE" TO SHOW MERCY, BUT IN THAT CASE, SHOWING MERCY WAS DISOBEDIENCE TO THE LORD'S WILL. SO IT MAY HAVE MADE MORE "SENSE" TO NOT PUNCH THE FELLOW PROPHET, BUT IT WAS DISOBEDIENCE.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: THE GOD OF MOUNTAINS & VALLEYS: IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO REMEMBER THAT OUR GOD IS NOT JUST A GOD OF MOUNTAINS. MEANING, THE LORD IS NOT JUST A GOD THAT WORKS MIGHTY VICTORIES ON GRAND SCALES AND IS NOT CONCERNED ABOUT SMALL MATTERS IN OUR LIVES. ALSO, THE LORD IS NOT A GOD WHO IS ONLY ABLE TO WORK WHEN WE ARE ON THE "MOUNTAINTOP" OF FAITH OR ALLEGIANCE TO HIM. IT IS WHEN WE ARE IN THE "VALLEYS" OF LIFE THAT WE MUST LOOK TO HIM AND CALL FOR HIM.

TOO OFTEN GOD'S CHILDREN THINK THAT BECAUSE THEY HAVE SINNED, THEY CAN NO LONGER LOOK TO GOD FOR HELP. WE ARE IN A "VALLEY" AND GOD IS WAITING FOR US TO PULL OURSELVES UP, AND GET BACK TO "GOOD STANDING" WITH HIM ON THE PINNACLE OF THE HILL. BUT THAT'S NOT TRUE. IT IS IN OUR "VALLEYS" THAT WE CAN AND SHOULD AND MUST SEE THAT THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD, AND EVEN THOUGH WE WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY...HE IS WITH US.

THE LORD IS ALSO NOT A GOD TOO PREOCCUPIED WITH WORLD AFFAIRS THAT HE DOESN'T CARE ABOUT THE "SMALL" THINGS OF OUR WORLD. CONVERSELY, WE MUST NOT GET SO FOCUSED ON THE LOVE OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER IN PERSONAL AREAS OF OUR LIVES THAT WE DO NOT TRUST THAT HE IS ALSO IN CONTROL OF THE UNIVERSE AT THE SAME TIME. THE LORD IS NOT JUST A GOD OF MOUNTAINS. THE LORD IS NOT JUST A GOD OF VALLEYS. THE LORD IS THE GOD OF MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS. THERE IS NO PLACE OR SITUATION OR CIRCUMSTANCE WHERE HE CANNOT WORK OR SHOW HIMSELF GREAT.

REJECT THE MODERN-DAY ARAMEAN BELIEF THAT THERE ARE AREAS OF YOUR LIFE OR THE WORLD IN GENERAL WHERE YAHWEH DOES NOT HAVE POWER. HE DOES. HE IS THE LORD GOD, "WHO IS AND WHO WAS AND WHO IS TO COME, THE ALMIGHTY." (REVELATION 1:8)