

THE GOD OF THE VALLEYS AND HILLS

BIBLE TEXT : I Kings 20:1-43

LESSON 299 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off" (I Kings 20:11).

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. 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,

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

Faith Without Repentance

In Elijah's test on Mount Carmel, God had proved Himself to be the true God of Heaven and earth by sending fire from Heaven to burn up the sacrifice that Elijah made. When all Israel was saying, "The LORD, he is the God," Ahab no doubt said the same thing. But Ahab did not repent.

Many people believe that there is a God; and some will even pray to Him when they are in trouble. But so long as they do not repent of their sins, they are not Christians. Some even say that they believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but they continue doing as they please, and do not ask anyone to forgive them. The true child of God is one who not only believed in the eternal God and His divine Son, but who realized that he had sinned against that holy God and that he had to repent and be saved from his sins.

Another Chance

God gave Ahab another chance. Once more God was going to prove to Ahab that He had all power in Heaven and in earth.

Ben-hadad, the King of Syria, assembled a great army with many horses and chariots, and laid siege to the city of Samaria. With the army were 32 kings, all set to fight against Israel. At this time Samaria was the capital of the ten tribes of Israel over whom Ahab and Jezebel ruled.

The fear of God makes a man a hero, but the fear of man makes him a coward. Ahab was a coward; and when Ben-hadad demanded tribute money, and even Ahab's family, Ahab helplessly said, "My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have."

Ahab was supposed to be the ruler of God's chosen people, but he never asked God to help him. How different would his reign have been if he had prayed as Solomon prayed: "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?" (I Kings 3:9).

When Ben-hadad saw that Ahab gave up easily, he asked for greater things. But this time he asked for more than Ahab could give. What could Ahab do? Outside the city walls lay the great armies of the Syrians, and inside huddled the frightened King of Israel and his people.

God's Care of His Own

Ahab called together the leaders in Israel for advice. They must have had some faith in God, for they boldly told Ahab to defy Ben-hadad: go out and fight against that ungodly king. Without the help of God such a course would have been suicide, but God was still looking out for His people Israel in spite of their wicked ruler.

When Ahab sent his answer to Ben-hadad that he would not yield to his demands, Ben-hadad became very angry. But in his pride he still felt he could easily overpower those few Israelites in Samaria. Did he not have a great army with horses and chariots,

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.

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 were there not 32 kings with him? He probably laughed over the idea that Ahab thought he could hold out against him. Ben-hadad gloatingly told Ahab that all of Israel's hosts would follow him when it came to a choice.

Ahab's reply has become a proverb: "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off." It means much the same as, "Do not count your chickens before they are hatched." Ben-hadad had better wait and see if the people would follow him. God was not going to let the heathen king defeat His people, so He sent a prophet to tell Ahab to prepare for battle; and He promised that Ahab would win the victory. It would not be through the strength of Ahab and his armies, but God would prove His power once more as the Lord God.

Drunkenness

Ben-hadad's army was great, and he trusted in his many princes and soldiers to win the battle for him. In his overconfidence, he and his princes had a drinking party, and drank until they were drunk. Many a battle has been lost because the army officers had their wits dulled by drinking. Even nations have gone down because of their leaders' drunkenness. The wise man has given us warning: "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, . . . At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder" (Proverbs 23:31, 32).

When Israel's army came upon the great army of Syria, there was no resistance. Each of Israel's soldiers slew a Syrian soldier, and Ben-hadad and the soldiers who were left ran for their lives.

The God of the Valleys and Hills

God had given Israel victory; but this was not the last of Israel's testings. The Prophet came to Ahab to tell him that at the end of a year the Syrian army would have been reorganized, and they would have come again against Israel.

We rejoice when we have won a battle against the enemy of our soul, but that is no time to let down our guard. As long as we live on earth, Satan will try to get us to turn from our Christian walk. We must be on the alert every minute to be able to stand against his sly attacks. If he cannot win us one way, he will try another. Ben-hadad had excused his first loss by saying that Israel's God was a God of the mountains, and that if the Israelites had to fight in the valley, their God would not be able to help them. God was listening, and He heard Ben-hadad's boast.

The Syrian army seemed to fill the whole country. As far as one could see were soldiers and horses and chariots. And there in the valley were the soldiers of Israel, huddled together "like two little flocks of kids." What chance did Israel's army have?

Right there in the valley, God proved that He was also a God of the valleys. Israel's God was ready to help all who called upon Him, whether they were on the mountains or in the valleys. For seven days the two armies waited and watched each other. Then the battle broke. And what a victory for Israel! Israel's "two little flocks of kids" slew 100,000 footmen of Ben-hadad's army; and then a wall tumbled down upon 27,000 more when they tried to run away and hide.

Coming Short

This was Ahab's opportunity to destroy all the heathen in the land. These glorious victories should have made him very courageous to fight the Lord's battles and destroy sin. But he did as another king of Israel had done — he spared the king alive when God had said to slay utterly. These people had been great sinners, and it was God's time to send judgment upon them.

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* 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

Ahab had been chosen as an instrument to do this work for the Lord — and he fell short; he failed in the task that had been given him to do.

And this is how he compromised: The servants of Ben-hadad went to Ahab in sackcloth to show their humility, to ask for the life of their king. And Ahab, instead of taking his stand for the right, called the heathen king his brother. His position in the world had blinded Ahab to his sins.

The Bible tells us that if a person comes among us who is well dressed, or an important person in the world, and we favour him and give him the best place to sit while we ignore the poor, we are showing partiality. "Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?" (James 2:2-4). A man's position and popularity in the world often blinds people's eyes to the sin that is in his life.

Because Ben-hadad was the king, Ahab favoured and called him brother. The servants noticed it at once, and quickly repeated, "Thy brother Ben-hadad." Ahab was one of God's chosen nation and should have kept himself clean from evil associations. Instead, Ahab called Ben-hadad to visit him, and as they rode together in a chariot they made a treaty to Ben-hadad's advantage, and the cause of Israel was lost again.

Ahab Reproved

God sent a prophet to tell Ahab that he had done the wrong thing. The prophet showed Ahab an object lesson to make him understand how important it was for him to take care of the Lord's work. He said someone had entrusted a prisoner to his care; but while he was busy with this and that, the prisoner disappeared. This was serious; for if the prisoner could not be found, the life of the keeper would have to be forfeited. Ahab thought the keeper who told the story had been very careless, and he deserved to die. He should know that if he did not do his duty he would have to pay for it.

The prophet took off his disguise, and Ahab recognized him. Poor Ahab! He was the one who had been given a job to do for the Lord, and he had let the prisoner escape. God had meant for Ahab to destroy Ben-hadad, but Ahab had made a friendly treaty with him and let him live. His punishment was that he and his people would have to give their lives for failing to do the bidding of the Lord.

Our Duty

God has given us a trust to keep. We have work to do for Him — the important work of winning souls for His Kingdom. But are we so busy here and there, doing this and that, that we do not have time to win souls for Jesus? Let us consider what we are doing. Do we have the Spirit of God on what we are doing, so that souls are being saved? It is the Spirit that calls people to repentance, and no amount of activity on our part will bring results if the Spirit of God is not there. And what we do must be done for the glory of God if we expect a reward from Him.

Our business is to win souls for Jesus. If we do not do it, what shall we say when we stand before the great Judge? Jesus Himself said: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

QUESTIONS

1. Who was Ben-hadad?
2. Where did he come to battle against Israel?
3. What was Ahab's answer to Ben-hadad's boast that he would win the people of Israel to himself?

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 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. What was the cause of Ben-hadad's defeat?
5. How long was it until the Syrian army came against Israel again?
6. How did the armies of Israel and the armies of Syria compare?
7. How many Syrians were killed in the battle?
8. What work did God have for Ahab at this time? Did Ahab do it?
9. What is our business in serving God?
10. What makes our work effectual for Jesus?