

### The Northern Kingdom of Israel is Attacked

#### 1 Kings 20:1-12

1 Kings 20:1-12 - *“Now Ben-Hadad the king of Syria gathered all his forces together; thirty-two kings were with him, with horses and chariots. And he went up and besieged Samaria, and made war against it. Then he sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel, and said to him, ‘Thus says Ben-Hadad, ‘Your silver and your gold are mine; your loveliest wives and children are mine.’” And the king of Israel answered and said, “My lord, O king, just as you say, I and all that I have are yours.”*

*Then the messengers came back and said, “Thus speaks Ben-Hadad, saying, ‘Indeed I have sent to you, saying, “You shall deliver to me your silver and your gold, your wives and your children”; but I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time, and they shall search your house and the houses of your servants. And it shall be, that whatever is pleasant in your eyes, they will put it in their hands and take it.”*

*So the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, “Notice, please, and see how this man seeks trouble, for he sent to me for my wives, my children, my silver, and my gold; and I did not deny him.” And all the elders and all the people said to him, “Do not listen or consent.”*

*Therefore he said to the messengers of Ben-Hadad, “Tell my lord the king, ‘All that you sent for to your servant the first time I will do, but this thing I cannot do.’” And the messengers departed and brought back word to him. Then Ben-Hadad sent to him and said, “The gods do so to me, and more also, if enough dust is left of Samaria for a handful for each of the people who follow me.” So the king of Israel answered and said, “Tell him, ‘Let not the one who puts on his armor boast like the one who takes it off.’” When Ben-Hadad heard this message, as he and the kings were drinking at the command post, he said to his servants, “Get ready.” And they got ready to attack the city.”*

#### Background Notes

At the end of 1 Kings 19 we studied the re-commissioning of the prophet Elijah and the anointing of Elisha for the ministry. Elijah will again appear on the scene in chapter 21, but chapter 20 is the record of the wars between the northern kingdom of Israel under King Ahab and the nation of Syria. The northern kingdom of Israel was threatened and attacked by a coalition of forces put together by King Ben-Hadad of Syria.

*“Ben-Hadad the king of Syria gathered all his forces together; thirty-two kings were with him, with horses and chariots. And he went up and besieged Samaria, and made war against it.”* There is some debate among biblical scholars whether this was Ben-Hadad I or Ben-Hadad II, but we know that the time period was the middle of the 9th century BC, approximately 850 BC.

Ben-Hadad and the Syrians put together a coalition of 32 kings. These “kings” ruled over small independent city states, and together they made up a considerable force. They came and besieged Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel.

From his superior position, Ben-Hadad threatened Ahab, even boasting that he would annihilate Samaria. *“Then Ben-Hadad sent to him and said, ‘The gods do so to me, and more also, if enough dust is left of Samaria for a handful for each of the people who follow me’”(v10).* In other words, Ben-Hadad said, “I have so many soldiers with me that if each one took only a handful of dirt from the city of Samaria, we’d level the place.”

At this point Ahab finally showed some courage! Courage, as we know, was very uncharacteristic of Ahab. Verse 11: *“So the king of Israel [Ahab] answered and said, ‘Tell him, ‘Let not the one who puts on his armor boast like the one who takes it off.’”* That is, “You haven’t won the battle yet, Ben-Hadad.” So the battle was about to be fought, and in the next section we’ll see that God delivered Israel.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The enemy always looks for vulnerable areas.

God included this chapter in His Word for two reasons:

1. So we would have an accurate historical record of the wars between the northern kingdom of Israel and the nation of Syria.
2. So we would learn valuable lessons about spiritual warfare.

Ben-Hadad was an enemy of God’s people Israel, and as such he represents the enemy of our souls. Here in this section we see three tactics of the enemy’s strategy. Each tactic is typical of Satan’s tactic in spiritual warfare. The first tactic is our first doctrinal point: ***the enemy always looks for vulnerable areas.***

Ben-Hadad knew that Israel was in a weakened condition, so he took this opportunity to attack. Remember, Israel had just suffered a 3 ½ -year drought and famine. The people were hurting. They were in a weakened condition, so they were vulnerable. Ben-Hadad tried to bring overwhelming forces against Israel to wipe them out while they were weak.

And that’s exactly how Satan, the enemy of our souls, works today. He looks for vulnerable areas in our churches, in our ministries, in our families, and in our personal lives. He always looks to attack us in our weak areas, where he can easily gain a victory.

Do you get discouraged or depressed easily? Watch out for an attack from the enemy when you’re discouraged. That’s one of your vulnerable areas. Are you easily tempted in the area of money? Watch out – he’ll surely tempt you in that vulnerable area! Are you vulnerable in the area of sex? Watch out! Satan will look for ways to trap you there - to ensnare you in your weak area.

Satan is aware of our vulnerable areas, and he will try to attack right there, knowing we’re most likely to fail in our weak areas. The enemy always looks for vulnerable areas.

## **2. The enemy always demands more.**

A second tactic that Satan uses in spiritual warfare is to ***always demand more***.

Ben-Hadad made increasing demands on Israel (v2-6). It seems that first he demanded for Ahab and Israel to be a vassal state under Syria's authority, and pay annual tribute to Syria. This was very typical of smaller kingdoms, or conquered kingdoms in those days. The conquered kingdom would have to pay annual tribute to the higher power. So Ahab agreed to those terms: "*Just as you say, my lord the king. I and all I have re yours*"(v4).

But once he gained an initial victory, Ben-Hadad increased his demands. In essence, he said: "I demanded your kingdom and your people - including your wives and children, and you agreed. Now not only are they mine and subject to me, but now I'm going to send my officials to search your palace and take whatever they want. They will seize everything you value and take it away<sup>1</sup>"

That's exactly the way the enemy of our soul operates. Satan always demands more. Do you think that you can make small compromises with Satan in any area of your life and keep it that way? No way. The enemy will always demand more. If you get involved in some worldly or sinful activity, watch out! More and more of your time, your money, and your energies will be demanded. Satan will compromise your witness, and he may even destroy your family. The enemy always demands more.

## **3. The enemy always attacks the family.**

Here we see a third tactic of the enemy: ***the enemy always attacks the family***. Ben-Hadad demanded ownership and control of all the families of the northern kingdom! "*Your silver and your gold are mine; your loveliest wives and children are mine.*"

Destruction of the family unit is certainly a tactic that Satan, the enemy of our souls, will use. Satan ***always*** seeks to attack and wreck the family. Why? Because the family is God's basic social unit!

God ordained the family. "Culture" and "society" didn't come up with the idea of family. **God** ordained the family! Satan will always try to attack and ruin the good things that God has created, so he will try to destroy the unity of the family in any way he can. And all too often this tactic is successful.

Satan always looks for ways to attack the family. Just look at how Satan has used Hollywood and TV and the internet to undermine the biblical concepts of the family by promoting "my personal happiness" as the highest goal. Where have the biblical ideals of sacrificial love and care gone? What has happened to a loving and godly authority structure in the home? Where has God's ideal plan for faithful life-long marriage gone? The enemy will always attack and seek to destroy the family.

## Practical Application

### Godly counsel can help you make the right decision!

*“So the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, ‘Notice, please, and see how this man seeks trouble, for he sent to me for my wives, my children, my silver, and my gold; and I did not deny him.’ And all the elders and all the people said to him, ‘Do not listen or consent.’” (v7-8)*

The counsel in verse 8 was good counsel. In fact, it was godly counsel! And notice – this good counsel came from the elders and all the people! Remember, these were the people of the northern kingdom of Israel, who certainly were not known for their godliness. What was going on here?!

I think there’s a good indication here that a measure of spiritual revival took place after Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. Remember at that event the people cried out, *“The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!” (1 Kings 18:39)*. This revival didn’t last long, but at least for the moment the elders and the people gave good and godly counsel to King Ahab.

And remember - this counsel was given when an overwhelming number of Syrian forces surrounded the city. Certainly this godly counsel was an indication that the people were trusting in the Lord to deliver them - at least at this point! And the most amazing aspect of all this is that King Ahab took their counsel! Can you believe it? This was not typical or characteristic of King Ahab. Ahab, as we know, usually wimped out! It shows what godly counsel can do.

If godly counsel helped Ahab, of all people, to make the right decision, how much more will godly counsel help believers to make good and wise decisions? If we’re seeking to follow the Lord and we need wisdom to make good decisions, godly counsel surely can help **us** make the right decision.

If you’re in the process of making an important decision in life right now, seek out godly counsel. You may not think you need it. Well, seek it anyway! You may have some blind spots that you don’t know about - that you’re not aware of. Ask for godly counsel. Godly counsel can help you make the right decision!