

Israel's Victory Over the Syrian Forces

1 Kings 20:13-21

1 Kings 20:13-31 – *“Suddenly a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel, saying, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the LORD.’” So Ahab said, “By whom?” And he said, “Thus says the LORD: ‘By the young leaders of the provinces.’” Then he said, “Who will set the battle in order?” And he answered, “You.” Then he mustered the young leaders of the provinces, and there were two hundred and thirty-two; and after them he mustered all the people, all the children of Israel—seven thousand.*

So they went out at noon. Meanwhile Ben-Hadad and the thirty-two kings helping him were getting drunk at the command post. The young leaders of the provinces went out first. And Ben-Hadad sent out a patrol, and they told him, saying, “Men are coming out of Samaria!” So he said, “If they have come out for peace, take them alive; and if they have come out for war, take them alive.”

Then these young leaders of the provinces went out of the city, with the army following them. And each one killed his man. So the Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them; and Ben-Hadad the king of Syria escaped on a horse with the cavalry. Then the king of Israel went out and attacked the horses and chariots, and killed the Syrians with a great slaughter.”

Background Notes

1 Kings 20:13-21 is the record of Israel's victory over the large coalition of kings and armies that had besieged Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel.

King Ben-Hadad of Syria had assembled a coalition of 32 kings, and together they besieged Samaria. Because King Ahab of Israel would not submit to Ben-Hadad's outrageous demands, the Syrian king decided to attack the city. He was particularly miffed because Ahab had also heaped scorn on his threat to capture the city. Ben-Hadad had threatened to level the city, but in an uncharacteristic show of courage Ahab had replied, *“Let not him who puts his armor on boasts like him who takes it off”(v11)*. That was like saying, “Don't count your chickens before they're hatched!

At that point a prophet came to Ahab with a word from the Lord. *“Suddenly a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel, saying, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the Lord’”(v13)*. The Lord promised that the Israel would defeat the Syrian forces!

Who was this prophet? We don't know! Maybe he was Macaiah. We'll read about the prophet Macaiah in 1 Kings 22. Was this prophet one of the 100 prophets who were hidden from Jezebel's massacre of God's prophets (1 Kings 18)? In any case, this true prophet not only predicted a victory for Israel, but he also told King Ahab exactly how to go about defeating the enemy!

The Lord's strategy involved sending 232 young leaders from the provinces out of the besieged city of Samaria. They would go out first, and then 7000 people would follow. Verse 15 indicates that these 7000 were everyone else left in Samaria who could fight! Most likely the 232 young leaders were military officers from the different regions of the kingdom of Israel. It seems they may have "just happened" to be in Samaria at the time of the siege. Of course the "coincidence" of their presence in Samaria was all part of God's timing!

These young leaders became an essential part of God's strategy for defeating the Syrian forces. *"Then the young leaders of the provinces went out of the city with the army which followed them. And each one killed his man; so the Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them."*(v19-20). Although Ben-Hadad himself escaped, the Syrian army suffered great losses. *"Then the king of Israel went out and attacked the horses and chariots, and killed the Syrians with a great slaughter"*(v21).

Doctrinal Points

1. God is patient and long-suffering.

God is patient. That great and amazing truth is taught in God's dealings with Ahab.

Although God had tried to soften Ahab up, he had not repented and turned to the Lord. God had sent a 3 ½ year drought and famine on the land of Israel, but Ahab did not repent or turn to the Lord. And then Ahab had witnessed a miracle at Mount Carmel, when the fire of the Lord fell from heaven upon the sacrifice - but again Ahab did not repent. Ahab had seen the defeat and execution of the false prophets of Baal, but he did not repent. Then God had graciously sent rain once again upon the land of Israel. But still Ahab did not repent! He did not turn to the Lord.

Now look at verse 13! God sent a prophet to Ahab with the good news that Ahab's army would defeat the great multitude of Syrian forces that very day! And notice what's added at the end of verse 13: *"And you shall know that I am the Lord."* Can you believe it?

You might wonder, "How many chances will Ahab get to repent, and turn to the Lord?" The point is: God is patient and long-suffering. Certainly this truth is taught in the record of God's dealings with King Ahab.

Do you ever wonder why God doesn't just zap all the evil people in this world – right away? Why not? Because God is patient and long-suffering. Aren't you glad that God was, and is, patient with you? Aren't you glad He gives you extra opportunities to respond positively to His teaching and discipline? God is patient and long-suffering!

2. God is a Master Strategist.

The Lord told Ahab exactly what to do. The 232 young officers of the provinces were to go out of the besieged city first, and then the others would follow.

Notice that God's strategy involved the element of surprise. *"So they went out at noon. Meanwhile Ben-Hadad and the thirty-two kings helping him were getting drunk at the command post"(v16)*. In the Middle East, no one starts a battle at noon, in the heat of the day! So Ben-Hadad and the coalition forces were caught completely off guard by this surprise maneuver. Ben-Hadad and the kings were sitting around at the command post, getting drunk! God knows all about the enemy. He is the Master Strategist!

In Scripture, when the enemy has surrounded God's people and is just about to be overrun them, God often steps in with an unusual strategy and snatches the victory away from the enemy! God is the Master Strategist, and He is **never defeated**. Satan thought he had defeated God in the Garden of Eden, when he deceived Adam and Eve and led them into sin and death. It looked like man and woman, the jewels of God's creation, would be under Satan's control forever.

But God is a master strategist! His strategy was already planned. God Himself would become a human - in order to die. Through that death, Satan would be defeated and the human race would be offered freedom. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, *"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He (Christ) Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."*

The resurrection must have been an unbelievable surprise for Satan! And a total defeat! God is a Master Strategist.

Practical Applications

1. If you want to be a winner, be an "obey-er."

Why was Israel a winner, even though they were greatly outnumbered by the Syrian forces? They won because they followed God's orders. They obeyed! Throughout its history, the nation of Israel never lost a battle when they followed God's orders. Whether it was the Midianites, or the Canaanites, or the Philistines - or whoever - Israel was never defeated as long as the nation obeyed the Lord.

There's certainly a lesson here for us. If you want to be a winner, be an "obey-er." We're not talking about winning on the athletic field or on the golf course. We're talking about *spiritual warfare*. If you want to be a winner, be an obey-er. Does Satan have you ensnared right now in some kind of situation, and you're very close to being defeated? You find you cannot resist temptation, and you're being drawn deeper and deeper into sin.

If you want to be a winner, you must be an obey-er. But you might be thinking, "But I can't obey. I can't resist this temptation." Listen! If you really want to obey God, He will give you the strength to obey. It's a decision – a matter of your will. And sincerely asking God for His help. If you want to be a winner, you *must* be an obey-er.

2. Make sure you have a better "thanksgiving record" than Ahab!

Throughout the Scripture record of his life, Ahab never thanked God for anything. When the rains returned to the land of Israel, Ahab never bothered to thank God. And here, after God graciously delivered the Syrian enemy into Ahab's hands, he did not thank the Lord. Nowhere in Scripture do we ever read of Ahab thanking God!

Do you have a better record of thanksgiving record than Ahab? When was the last time you thanked God for your family? When was the last time that you thanked God for the Bible? When was the last time you thanked God for being such an awesome God? Make sure you have a better thanksgiving record than Ahab!

3. Don't think that God's deliverance is necessarily a sign of God's approval!

After God gave him the victory over the Syrian forces, how do you think King Ahab rated himself? I dare say he probably thought very highly of *himself*! He probably even thought that he had God's "stamp of approval" on his lifestyle.

But nothing could be further from the truth! Notice what God said to King Ahab: "*Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the Lord.*"(v13). God's purpose in delivering the Syrians into Ahab's hand was not to assure Ahab that God approved of Ahab or his lifestyle! God's purpose in giving him the victory was to tell King Ahab, once again, "*You shall know that I am the Lord.*" But Ahab wasn't listening.

Is it possible that God has graciously delivered you from some dilemma recently? Did He rescue you even though you're not walking in obedience with Him? Well, just because He graciously delivered you from your problem or dilemma, don't jump to the conclusion that God is pleased with you and your lifestyle. He rescued you so that "*you shall know that I am the Lord.*" Respond with repentance - and thanks! Don't assume that God's deliverance is necessarily a sign of God's approval!