

Ahab's Second Victory Over the Syrian Forces

1 Kings 20:22-30

1 Kings 20:22-30 – *“Afterward, the prophet came to the king of Israel and said to him, “Strengthen your position and see what must be done, because next spring the king of Syria will attack you again.”*

Then the servants of the king of Syria said to him, “Their gods are gods of the hills. Therefore they were stronger than we; but if we fight against them in the plain, surely we will be stronger than they. So do this thing: Dismiss the kings, each from his position, and put captains in their places; and you shall muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse and chariot for chariot. Then we will fight against them in the plain; surely we will be stronger than they.” And he listened to their voice and did so.

So it was, in the spring of the year, that Ben-Hadad mustered the Syrians and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. When the Israelites were mustered and given provisions, they marched out against them. Now the Israelites encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, while the Syrians filled the countryside.

Then a man of God came and spoke to the king of Israel, and said, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Because the Syrians have said, “The LORD is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys,” therefore I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

And they encamped opposite each other for seven days. So it was that on the seventh day the battle was joined; and the Israelites killed one hundred thousand foot soldiers of the Syrians in one day. But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; then a wall fell on twenty-seven thousand of the men who were left. And Ben-Hadad fled and went into the city, into an inner chamber.”

Background Notes

Ahab, the seventh king of the northern kingdom of Israel, reigned in the 9th century BC. 1 Kings 20:22-30 is the record of King Ahab's second victory over King Ben-Hadad and the Syrian forces. God gave Israel the victory even though Ahab was not a good king. In fact, 1 Kings 16:30 says, *“Now Ahab, the son of Omri, did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him.”* God graciously gave Ahab many opportunities to change his ways and turn the nation back to the Lord, but Ahab did not respond.

Already in this chapter we've seen that God permitted Ahab to triumph over King Ben-Hadad and the Syrian forces, when they besieged the capital city of Samaria. In accordance with the word of the Lord through a prophet, King Ahab and the Israelites were victorious in the face of overwhelming odds. It was obvious that God had given him the victory - but still Ahab did not acknowledge the Lord.

In 1 Kings 20:22-30, once again God dealt graciously with King Ahab. The prophet came again to Ahab and told him to prepare for another war with the Syrians in the spring of the year (v22). Right before the battle, a prophet assured Ahab that the great multitude of the Syrians would be delivered into his hands.

Notice the end of verse 28 - the words of the Lord to Ahab, through the prophet: *"I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord."* It's quite obvious that the Lord was trying to break through Ahab's hardened heart. But once again, in spite of another miraculous victory over the Syrians, Ahab did not acknowledge the Lord.

Doctrinal Points

1. Unbelievers have strange ideas about God.

When the Syrians were defeated, they came up with the idea that Israel was protected by the "gods of the hills"! *"Then the servants of the king of Syria said to him, 'Their gods are gods of the hills. Therefore they were stronger than we; but if we fight against them in the plain, surely we will be stronger than they' (v23).*

That's a strange idea, isn't it? But it was not unusual! The ancient pagans had all kinds of strange ideas about God. Remember the Philistines, who thought they could control the God of Israel if they captured the Ark of the Covenant? And here the Syrians thought that certain gods controlled the hills and certain other gods were in charge of the valleys. They thought that the god of the hills favored Israel, and the god of the valleys favored the Syrians. Unbelievers have strange ideas about God!

Notice one reason why God gave the victory to Israel. Verse 28: *"Thus says the Lord: 'Because the Syrians have said, 'The Lord is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys,' therefore I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.'"*

The ancient pagans were not the only people that had strange ideas about God. Unbelievers today have strange ideas about God as well! Some unbelievers think that God is some kind of "celestial killjoy." Others think that God is like a heavenly Santa Claus. Others think that God must be appeased, or manipulated. And still others think of God as an impersonal "Force." Unbelievers have strange ideas of God.

Whether it's Syrians in that day or unbelievers today - why do unbelievers have strange ideas about God? The reason is that we can only have correct ideas about God through revelation - the revelation of Scripture! Correct knowledge of God does not come from human reason, but unbelievers don't acknowledge revelation from God. Thus unbelievers have strange ideas about God.

2. "Murphy's Law" is not in the Bible!

You've all heard about "Murphy's Law" - right? Murphy's Law says that 'If anything can go wrong, it will go wrong!' That's Murphy's Law. And it's not in the Bible.

I'm sure all of us have had experiences when we were convinced that Murphy's Law must be true. (I see some smiles!) A few months ago I replaced a faucet in our bathroom sink at home. A job that should have taken twenty minutes took several hours. So many things went wrong that I was almost convinced Murphy's Law is true!

I'm sure the Syrians must have thought that Murphy's Law was true. They did everything they could to ensure victory in the battle (v24-25). They took the 32 kings that had joined Ben-Hadad's coalition out of the front line positions, and put experienced military officers in those positions. No doubt they thought, "What do those small-time kings know about fighting, anyway?" So they put experienced military men in the critical front line positions.

Then they rebuilt their cavalry and armored divisions so that the army was just as strong as it had ever been. And they picked the time and place for battle (v26). Aphek was a relatively flat tableland area east of the Sea of Galilee, where they could use their chariots.

The Syrian forces greatly outnumbered Israel's small army - in fact, verse 27 says that Israel's army looked like two little flocks of goats! It looked like everything would go Syria's way. But then "Murphy's Law" went into effect - or so it seemed! One week later, when the battle joined, Israel knocked off 100,000 Syrian troops in one day! Then the soldiers who escaped to the city of Aphek were killed when the city wall "just happened" to fall on 27,000 others. Talk about Murphy's Law! It's almost cartoon material.

But Murphy's Law is **not** biblical! The one true God of Israel was in complete control of these events - even the collapse of the wall at Aphek. It reminds us of how God brought down the walls of Jericho, doesn't it? We don't know whether God used an earthquake or the increased weight of many soldiers standing on the wall. But what we do know is that the collapse of the wall at Aphek didn't happen by chance. God had said that Syria would be defeated - and God was fighting for Israel!

Ephesians 1:11 says that God "*works all things after the counsel of His will.*" In other words, **God controls all events!** There's no such thing as Murphy's Law for the unbeliever - or the believer. God controls all events. Murphy's Law is not in the Bible!

Practical Applications

1. Depend on God, but do your part.

God promised the victory to Israel, but notice that King Ahab and Israel had things to do in the time God gave them before the battle. Verse 22: *“Go, strengthen yourself; take note, and see what you should do, for in the spring of the year the king of Syria will come up against you.”* Yes Israel was to depend on God - but they were not just to sit back and do nothing. They were to prepare as best they could. They were to get their equipment together and get trained!

In the same way, in the Christian life and in spiritual warfare, we are to depend on God - but we are to do our part as well. *“Go, strengthen yourself!”* We are to strengthen ourselves for spiritual warfare by reading and studying Scripture. In Ephesians 6 we are told to put on the full armor of God, that we may be able to stand against the schemes, or tricks, or deceptions of the devil.

This battle between Syria and Israel certainly portrays this practical application. Depend on God, but do your part!

2. When you feel like a little goat, remember the Shepherd!

Verse 27 says that the army of Israel looked like two little flocks of goats, while the Syrians filled the countryside! Did you ever feel like one little goat in a little flock of little goats? Spiritual opposition is all around you, and the opposition seems so great and strong? Do the problems you face seem insurmountable? Well, when you feel like a little goat, remember the Shepherd!

Israel looked pathetically small, like two little flocks of goats in the midst of innumerable Syrians. What a sight it must have been! But God was Israel's Shepherd, and that made all the difference. God's little finger could squash all those Syrians with no problem at all. So when you feel like a goat, remember the Shepherd. One little goat plus God is always a majority!

Maybe you feel like a little goat, or like you're part of a little flock of little goats right now – your little family, your little church, or your little ministry. Does it seem that everyone and everything is going against you? Strong opposition and insurmountable problems? Or so it seems? Well, just remember this. When you feel like a little goat, remember the Shepherd!