

## King Ahab Makes a Treaty With the Enemy

### 1 Kings 20:31-34

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*Now the men were watching closely to see whether any sign of mercy would come from him; and they quickly grasped at this word and said, “Your brother Ben-Hadad.” So he said, “Go, bring him.” Then Ben-Hadad came out to him; and he had him come up into the chariot.*

*So Ben-Hadad said to him, “The cities which my father took from your father I will restore; and you may set up marketplaces for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria.” Then Ahab said, “I will send you away with this treaty.” So he made a treaty with him and sent him away.“*

### Background Notes

1 Kings 20:31-34 is the record of King Ahab's disobedience, when he made a treaty with Ben-Hadad, king of Syria. The events in these verses happened some time after the great confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. The defeat of the prophets of Baal should have been enough to turn wicked King Ahab around and cause him to repent. But even though that never happened, God continued to show unbelievable patience and tolerance for the weak-willed, waffling and unrepentant king.

Syria was the enemy nation to the north of the northern kingdom of Israel. In the earlier part of 1 Kings 20, the Syrian forces under King Ben-Hadad, came south and made war with Israel. But God graciously delivered King Ahab - not just once but twice! It was quite obvious that these were the Lord's victories because in both cases, Israel was greatly outnumbered. Verse 27, *“Now the children of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, while the Syrians filled the countryside.”* Israel was greatly outnumbered, yet God gave the victory on both occasions.

In both cases, a prophet of the Lord predicted victory, not because of Ahab's godliness, but to show Ahab that the God of Israel was fully in control. Look back at verse 13, before the first victory: *“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.’”*

And before the second victory, in verse 28: *“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.””*

What did Ahab do after the second great victory that the Lord gave him? Ben-Hadad, the pagan king of Syria, had been captured. The Lord had delivered him into Ahab’s hands. Ahab had the responsibility to remove this enemy of Israel. Wicked King Ben-Hadad had threatened to completely strip Ahab of all that he possessed: *“Your silver and gold are mine, and the best of your wives and children are mine.”* (v5). But God had delivered this pagan king into Ahab’s power, and Ahab should have executed this enemy of Israel. He should have repented, thanked the Lord, and then completed the defeat of Syria.

So what did Ahab do with this pagan king, a man whom God had delivered to Ahab for destruction? Ahab made a treaty with Ben-Hadad - and called him “my brother”! Can you believe it? That’s like capturing a convicted terrorist, then making peace with the killer, embracing him as “my brother,” and letting him go free! Unbelievable!

In His Law God decreed that any person who was “appointed for destruction” was to be executed. Leviticus 27:29 says, *“No person who is devoted to destruction may be ransomed. They are to be put to death.”* This was the case of pagan King Ben-Hadad of Syria, who had terrorized Israel. No person like him was to be ransomed, or shown mercy, but was surely to be put to death. But Ahab did not follow the laws of the Lord. He was disobedient. He made a treaty with him – and actually called him my brother. He allowed King Ben-Hadad go free. *“Ahab said, “On the basis of a treaty I will set you free.” So he made a treaty with him, and let him go”.*

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The enemy will try to take advantage of Christian attitudes.

I’m sure you’re aware that the war stories in the Old Testament were not put there to make the Old Testament more exciting! And they’re not included so we’d have an accurate military history of Israel, although they certainly are that. The Old Testament provides an accurate historical account of what took place in Israel.

But these Old Testament accounts were included for more than history alone. In every case, the tactics of Israel’s enemies illustrate some of Satan’s tactics in spiritual warfare, and we certainly see that here. Just as Ben-Hadad tried to take advantage of God’s people because he knew of their more lenient attitude, so Satan will try to take advantage of us.

Look at what Ben-Hadad's servants suggested: *"His servants said to him, "Look now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings. Please, let us put sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he will spare your life"(v31).* Sackcloth and ropes, by the way, were signs of submission and humility. So Ben-Hadad's servants deceptively put on sackcloth and ropes and went to Ahab. They hoped to take advantage of the more merciful attitudes of the nation of Israel. And their deception worked!

We need to be aware of this tactic of the enemy. The enemy will try to take advantage of the Christian's kind and merciful attitudes. As the Lord Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, we are to love our enemies - but that doesn't mean that we are to let the enemy take advantage of our Christian attitudes! The enemy will always try to take advantage of Christian attitudes.

This doctrinal point has many applications, from the so-called "rice Christians" (people who pretend to be converts to take financial advantage of the missionary's charity); to non-Christians who may try to take advantage of you because they know that Christians are giving and forgiving people.

There have been several incidents at our church when non-Christians have tried to take advantage of Christian attitudes of mercy. Not too long ago, a woman showed up on a Sunday morning and claimed that she was penniless, and had no food. She said her daughter was in jail, and that she needed money to go to downtown Chicago to visit her daughter. Some of the church members were about to give her money, but when someone asked for her address, she gave an address that was two doors away from a member of the congregation. He knew she didn't live there, and it was found that her story was a pack of lies. Sadly, I'm sure many of you could give similar stories.

Remember, the enemy will try to take advantage of Christian attitudes, and this doctrinal point is being taught here. The enemy will try to take advantage of Christian attitudes. We need to be aware of the enemy's strategies.

## **2. The enemy will try to bribe the Christian.**

Look at what Ben-Hadad said in verse 34: *"Then Ahab said to him, 'The cities which my father took from your father I will restore; and you may set up marketplaces for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria.'" Ben-Hadad promised that he would return some of Israel's territory that Syria had previously captured. He also promised to reduce the trade tariffs, and allow Israel to set up market places in the streets of Damascus, the capital of Syria. Most likely the treaty also involved a commitment to stand together against the rising threat of the Assyrian empire, which was definitely on the horizon.*

Well, this treaty was way too appealing! Ahab couldn't resist. He couldn't turn it down! He allowed himself to be bribed by the enemy. What a lesson for us!

The enemy will try to bribe the Christian. How often have Christians been bribed into unholy alliances with Satan and the world – by the lure of money, or success, or relationships? 2 Timothy 4:10 mentions a man named Demas who was formerly a co-worker in ministry with the apostle Paul. But Demas had deserted Paul, because he *“loved this present world.”*

The enemy bribed one of my former students, a Christian young man, to become involved in a sinful relationship. He divorced his Christian wife and left his family to marry a non-Christian woman whom he was trying to lead to Christ. Bribed by the enemy! It's a very sad story. Be careful. The enemy will try to bribe the Christian.

## Practical Application

### Be careful about who you call “my brother.”

In verse 32, Ahab responded to Ben-Hadad's servants: *“Your servant Ben-Hadad says, ‘Please let me live.’” And he said, “Is he still alive? He is my brother.”* And then King Ahab invited Ben-Hadad to come up into his chariot! This was a position of great favor. It was a gesture of friendship and solidarity. It meant that they were no longer enemies, but that they were equals. And then he agreed to a treaty with this evil pagan king!

Can you believe that Ahab called evil Ben-Hadad *“my brother”*? Ben-Hadad was devoted to the death and destruction of Israel's people, and yet Ahab called him “my brother”! It's clear that Ahab wanted what he would gain from a relationship and a treaty with Ben-Hadad. He should have been more careful!

Unfortunately, there are a number of Christian ministries today that are all too quick to call non-Christians “my brother” - and take donations from them! There are certain advantages that non-Christians can gain by giving money to Christian ministries – for example, a reputation as a philanthropist. So in their desire for funds, Christian ministries may make the mistake of calling them “brothers and sisters.”

We, too, must be careful when we use the term, “my brother.” We should be willing to extend fellowship to every true believer, but at the same time we must be careful about how and whom we welcome people into the fellowship of our churches. Be careful about calling someone “my brother.”

Those are just two examples of many applications that could be given here. Just be very careful about who you call “my brother.”