

Prophecy of Ahab's Death

1 Kings 20:35-42

1 Kings 20:35-43 - *“Now a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his neighbor by the word of the LORD, “Strike me, please.” And the man refused to strike him. Then he said to him, “Because you have not obeyed the voice of the LORD, surely, as soon as you depart from me, a lion shall kill you.” And as soon as he left him, a lion found him and killed him.*

And he found another man, and said, “Strike me, please.” So the man struck him, inflicting a wound. Then the prophet departed and waited for the king by the road, and disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes. Now as the king passed by, he cried out to the king and said, “Your servant went out into the midst of the battle; and there, a man came over and brought a man to me, and said, ‘Guard this man; if by any means he is missing, your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.’ While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone.” Then the king of Israel said to him, “So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it.”

And he hastened to take the bandage away from his eyes; and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. Then he said to him, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Because you have let slip out of your hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.’” So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and displeased, and came to Samaria.”

Background Notes

The last section of 1 Kings 20 is the account of the unusual way King Ahab was told he would lose his life, because he did not execute judgment on the king of Syria.

We've got to admit that this is a very unusual story. One prophet said to another prophet, *“By the word of the Lord, strike me.”* The second prophet refused to strike the first prophet, and as a result a lion killed the second prophet! Sounds like pretty harsh judgment, doesn't it?

When the same request was made of a third prophet, the third prophet hit the first prophet and injured him. Then the first prophet put a bandage over his eyes and his head injury, and waited for King Ahab to pass by in his chariot. When Ahab arrived, the prophet told Ahab a made-up story, then whipped off the bandage and pronounced Ahab's judgment.

What was going on? First of all, we need to recognize that the “sons of the prophets” (v35) were the Bible colleges or seminaries of that day. It seems that they originated all the way back in the prophet Samuel’s time, and they were greatly strengthened under the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. So what we have here is one of the student prophets talking to two other prophets. It’s possible that the second and third prophets were not fellow students but just ordinary citizens, but in any case this was an object lesson - a “role-play.” The Lord used this prophet and this object lesson to show Ahab that he was guilty because he had allowed King Ben-Hadad of Syria go free.

In the role-play the prophet told Ahab that he was a soldier, and in the line of duty he was given a prisoner to guard. He was told, “If you let that prisoner go free, it’ll cost you your life, or a talent of silver.” No common soldier would have such a great amount of silver. But the prisoner escaped, and in the role-play the “soldier” was pleading with Ahab for mercy and clemency. “Please go easy on me! Be lenient. I didn’t mean to let my prisoner go. While I was busy here and there, he was gone.”

But Ahab showed no mercy. He said, “You decided your own fate. You let your prisoner escape. It will cost you your life.” At that moment the prophet whipped off his bandage - and King Ahab recognized him as a prophet! *“And he hastened to take the bandage away from his eyes; and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. Then he said to him, ‘Thus says the Lord: ‘Because you have let slip out of your hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.’”*

Ahab had judged himself. It reminds us of the prophet Nathan coming to King David with the parable about the rich man who took a poor man’s pet lamb, and killed it for his dinner. Remember that event? David angrily judged that the rich man was guilty, and then Nathan said: *“You are that man.”* David judged himself. Something similar was going on here.

This prophecy of judgment, by the way, was fulfilled in 1 Kings 22, when Syria defeated Israel and Ahab was killed. The prophecy of judgment was further fulfilled in 2 Kings 10 and 2 Kings 13, when Israel was defeated by Syria.

Notice that pagan King Ben-Hadad was “appointed to destruction” by the Lord Himself (v42)! Ahab had no business making a treaty with Ben-Hadad, or letting him go free. But Ahab didn’t want to admit his guilt. He was sullen and displeased as he went home to his palace in Samaria.

You would think that Ahab would have repented at this point, especially in view of the prophecy of judgment on himself and on Israel. But no, weak-willed Ahab went home sulking - sullen, displeased, vexed and angry. Sadly, that’s the way many people today react when they hear the message of judgment that will come in the future.

Doctrinal Points

1. The will of the Lord may be unpleasant at times.

In verse 35, the word of the Lord, and thus the will of the Lord, for the second prophet was to strike the first prophet. We must assume that it was quite clear and obvious that there was no question that this was the word of the Lord. This wasn't a "the Lord told me" situation, like: "Here's what the Lord told me: Hurt me! Strike me." It wasn't a murky situation, like this example: Some time ago a young woman came to me for advice. A young man had told her, "The Lord told me that I'm to marry you. He told me that's His will." But she didn't feel the same way! I told her, "Don't for a minute assume that it was the Lord who told him that he's to marry you! Make sure that the Lord tells you as well – and in no uncertain terms!" What I'm saying here is, this situation with the prophets was not a "the Lord told me" situation. We must assume that in the case of the prophets, the word of the Lord was quite clear.

Why did the second prophet refuse to strike the first prophet? Probably because it was unpleasant! "I don't want to hit you! I don't want to hurt you." But here's the lesson: the will of the Lord may be unpleasant at times. For example, telling non-Christian people that they're on the road to hell is not pleasant - but it is the will of the Lord. Announcing that you are forever lost if you're not trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation - that's not pleasant. I don't like to do that - but it is the will of the Lord.

A couple of years ago one of my students asked me if he could establish a Paul-Timothy relationship with me, so I would disciple him. I agreed, but first I had to say some very unpleasant things to that student. He didn't appreciate what I told him, and he didn't react well - at least not at that time. I hope he understands now. Doing the will of the Lord may be unpleasant at times.

2. Lying "for a good purpose" is not taught in the Bible!

Maybe some of you have concluded that the prophet "lied" when he told the made-up story in the object lesson. Was the Bible teaching that it's okay to lie, or tell made-up stories, as long as it's for a good purpose? Or if the "end justifies the means"? Some Christians actually believe that. They believe that it's OK to lie in the case of warfare, for example. That's called "wartime ethics." Or it's OK to lie if it's the "lesser of two evils," or if it's the "loving thing to do." That's called "situational ethics." No. Alternate forms of ethics are not taught in the Bible. ***Lying "for a good purpose" is not taught in the Bible.***

What was going on in 1 Kings 20 was a drama. It was an object lesson. If we were to have a dramatic presentation as part of a church service, and in the presentation one of the players was to lie or steal, we wouldn't think that the church is teaching that lying or stealing is OK if it's for a good purpose! Of course not! We all understand that it's a drama - an object lesson.

So don't get the idea that because the prophet lied in this object lesson that the Bible is teaching it's okay to lie on some occasions - as long as it's for a good purpose. This story of the three prophets was not included in the Bible to teach us that it's OK to "tell lies" in some situations! No, **lying for a good purpose is not taught in the Bible.**

Practical Application

Are you vulnerable to satanic attack?

What was said, and what happened, to the man who refused to obey the voice of the Lord? Verse 36: *"Because you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, surely, as soon as you depart from me, a lion shall kill you." And as soon as he left him, a lion found him and killed him.*"

In 1 Peter 5:8 we read, *"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."* Perhaps we have a picture of that truth taught right here. The spiritual picture is perhaps seen in the fact that the man was actually attacked and killed by a lion.

Why did a lion kill the man? The reason - because he **disobeyed**. That was the bottom line! He probably reasoned that striking the prophet was an unpleasant task. It was just a small thing - something he didn't want to do. It wasn't really disobeying the Lord. But regardless of what **he** thought about it, he was vulnerable to attack by the lion because he disobeyed.

Are you vulnerable to satanic attack? Am I vulnerable to satanic attack? We are vulnerable if we're not obeying the Lord in the little things He asks us to do. Are we obeying the Lord in the unpleasant duties of life?

Let's take one example. What about discipline in our families? Discipline of our children is not pleasant, but it is the will of the Lord. Are we vulnerable to satanic attack because we're failing to discipline our children? We may think, "Is that really disobeying the Lord? It's so unpleasant. I want my children to be my friends. It's not such a huge thing, is it?" Yes, it is a big thing. It's disobedience! And we may very well be opening ourselves (and our families) up to attack because of disobedience in this area.

Are we vulnerable to satanic attack? This question applies to us as individuals, and it should be applied to our churches as well. Many churches are reluctant to carry out biblical discipline of church members - or church leaders - who are living disobedient, sinful lives. Churches that disobey the Lord by failing to discipline appropriately are opening up both the church and its members for satanic attack.

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