

1 Kings 20

Verses 1-6

Now Ben-hadad king of Aram gathered all his army, and there were thirty-two kings with him, and horses and chariots. And he went up and besieged Samaria and fought against it. ² Then he sent messengers to the city to Ahab king of Israel and said to him, “Thus says Ben-hadad, ³ ‘Your silver and your gold are mine; your most beautiful wives and children are also mine.’” ⁴ The king of Israel replied, “It is according to your word, my lord, O king; I am yours, and all that I have.” ⁵ Then the messengers returned and said, “Thus says Ben-hadad, ‘Surely, I sent to you saying, “You shall give me your silver and your gold and your wives and your children,” ⁶ but about this time tomorrow I will send my servants to you, and they will search your house and the houses of your servants; and whatever is desirable in your eyes, they will take in their hand and carry away.’”

Now Ben-hadad king of Aram gathered all his army, and there were thirty-two kings with him, and horses and chariots. And he went up and besieged Samaria and fought against it.

Ben-hadad ruled Aram from 865 to 842 BC.

See chart 2005

King	Reign
Ben-Hadad I	885-865 BC
Hadadezer (Ben Hadad II)	865 - 842 BC
Hazael	842–805 or 796 BC
Ben-Hadad III	796 to 792 BC
Rezin	754 BC–732 BC

This area took its name from Aram a son of Shem.

See Genesis 10:21-23

²¹ Also to Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, and the older brother of Japheth, children were born. ²² The sons of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. ²³ The sons of Aram were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.

However, Aram is now known as Syria.

See map 2010



The king of Aram besieged Samaria around 857 BC.

⁵ Then the messengers returned and said, “Thus says Ben-hadad, ‘Surely, I sent to you saying, “You shall give me your silver and your gold and your wives and your children,” ⁶ but about this time tomorrow I will send my servants to you, and they will search your house and the houses of your servants; and whatever is desirable in your eyes, they will take in their hand and carry away.””

Ben-hadad amended his original proposal of taking what belonged to Ahab saying he would now take what belonged to Ahab & his servants.

Verses 7-12

Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land and said, “Please observe and see how this man is looking for trouble; for he sent to me for my wives and my children and my silver and my gold, and I did not refuse him.”⁸ All the elders and all the people said to him, “Do not listen or consent.”⁹ So he said to the messengers of Ben-hadad, “Tell my lord the king, ‘All that you sent for to your servant at the first I will do, but this thing I cannot do.’” And the messengers departed and brought him word again.¹⁰ Ben-hadad sent to him and said, “May the gods do so to me and more also, if the dust of Samaria will suffice for handfuls for all the people who follow me.”¹¹ Then the king of Israel replied, “Tell *him*, ‘Let not him who girds on *his armor* boast like him who takes *it off*.’”¹² When *Ben-hadad* heard this message, as he was drinking with the kings in the temporary shelters, he said to his servants, “Station *yourselves*.” So they stationed *themselves* against the city.

Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land and said, “Please observe and see how this man is looking for trouble; for he sent to me for my wives and my children and my silver and my gold, and I did not refuse him.”

Ahab must have known he wouldn't get much support from the people of Israel or he would have tried to assemble them when he was first approached by the King of Syria.

⁸ All the elders and all the people said to him, “Do not listen or consent.”⁹ So he said to the messengers of Ben-hadad, “Tell my lord the king, ‘All that you sent for to your servant at the first I will do, but this thing I cannot do.’” And the messengers departed and brought him word again.

All of Israel would have been looted if they didn't take a stand against Syria now that the King wanted all of Israel to give up their families and wealth.

¹⁰ Ben-hadad sent to him and said, “May the gods do so to me and more also, if the dust of Samaria will suffice for handfuls for all the people who follow me.

Ben-hadad was saying that he had so many fighting men (127,000) that there would not be enough left in Israel that his soldiers could scrape together even a handful of dust from what would be left.

¹¹ Then the king of Israel replied, “Tell *him*, ‘Let not him who girds on *his armor* boast like him who takes *it off*.”

Ahab said war is unpredictable and one should not boast until it is over. Today we might say, don't count your chickens before they hatch.

¹² When *Ben-hadad* heard this message, as he was drinking with the kings in the temporary shelters, he said to his servants, “Station *yourselves*.” So they stationed *themselves* against the city.

The king of Syria had been waiting for the food and water to run out in the city of Samaria but when he heard Ahab's reply, Ben-hadad gave the orders for the attack to begin.

Verses 13-15

Now behold, a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel and said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver them into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the Lord.’” ¹⁴ Ahab said, “By whom?” So he said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘By the young men of the rulers of the provinces.’” Then he said, “Who shall begin the battle?” And he answered, “You.” ¹⁵ Then he mustered the young men of the rulers of the provinces, and there were 232; and after them he mustered all the people, *even* all the sons of Israel, 7,000.

Now behold, a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel and said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver them into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

Even though Ahab was an evil king God blessed him with another great miracle (the first one being the fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice). This was done so Ahab might know that God was the Lord.

¹⁵ Then he mustered the young men of the rulers of the provinces, and there were 232; and after them he mustered all the people, *even* all the sons of Israel, 7,000.

Only 7,000 men showed up to help King Ahab.

Verses 16-21

They went out at noon, while Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the temporary shelters with the thirty-two kings who helped him. ¹⁷ The young men of the rulers of the provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out and they told him, saying, “Men have come out from Samaria.” ¹⁸ Then he said, “If they have come out for peace, take them alive; or if they have come out for war, take them alive.” ¹⁹ So these went out from the city, the young men of the rulers of the provinces, and the army which followed them. ²⁰ They killed each his man; and the Arameans fled and Israel pursued them, and Ben-hadad king of Aram escaped on a horse with horsemen. ²¹ The king of Israel went out and struck the horses and chariots, and killed the Arameans with a great slaughter.

They went out at noon, while Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the temporary shelters with the thirty-two kings who helped him.

The leaders of Syrian army had fallen into a bad habit as they waited for the people of Samaria to run out of food and water. They assumed any enemy forces coming out of the city to meet them in battle were insignificant and did not take their appearance seriously.

¹⁸ Then he said, “If they have come out for peace, take them alive; or if they have come out for war, take them alive.” ¹⁹ So these went out from the city, the young men of the rulers of the provinces, and the army which followed them.

The 232 leaders and their men (7,000) were viewed as harmless against the King of Syria and his large army so the king gave an order to take them alive. This order kept the Syrian soldiers from killing anyone so the Israelites were able to inflict a heavy toll on the Syrians.

²⁰ They killed each his man; and the Arameans fled and Israel pursued them, and Ben-hadad king of Aram escaped on a horse with horsemen. ²¹ The king of Israel went out and struck the horses and chariots, and killed the Arameans with a great slaughter.

When the king of Syria returned home he should have been overthrown and put to death for this blunder, but the 32 kings of his empire were in no position to do anything because they were just as guilty as Ben-hadad.

Verses 22-25

Then the prophet came near to the king of Israel and said to him, “Go, strengthen yourself and observe and see what you have to do; for at the turn of the year the king of Aram will come up against you.”²³ Now the servants of the king of Aram said to him, “Their gods are gods of the mountains, therefore they were stronger than we; but rather let us fight against them in the plain, *and* surely we will be stronger than they.”²⁴ Do this thing: remove the kings, each from his place, and put captains in their place,²⁵ and 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, and surely we will be stronger than they.” And he listened to their voice and did so.

Then the prophet came near to the king of Israel and said to him, “Go, strengthen yourself and observe and see what you have to do; for at the turn of the year the king of Aram will come up against you.”

Jewish commentators identify the prophet mentioned here to be Micaiah. He is one of the four disciples of Elijah, not to be confused with Micah, the prophet of the Book of Micah.

The kings of Israel were often given information about the future that was of great value to know in advance. It’s also true that these evil kings did not deserve the grace that God showed them since they never repented of their pagan ways.

However, by God doing this He blessed the 7,000 faithful in Israel by destroying an enemy that would have caused them to suffer the indignities that an invading army often inflicts on an enemy. Also, southern Israel was blessed because if Syria had been victorious against the north they may have extended their invasion into the south.

²³ Now the servants of the king of Aram said to him, “Their gods are gods of the mountains, therefore they were stronger than we; but rather let us fight against them in the plain, *and* surely we will be stronger than they.

When the servants said that “their gods are gods of the mountains” it was based on their observation of the Jews and it was a logical conclusion. Israel worshipped many gods at many high places.

But their observation was also misguided because they were fighting against the one true God. What they didn’t know will cost them their lives.

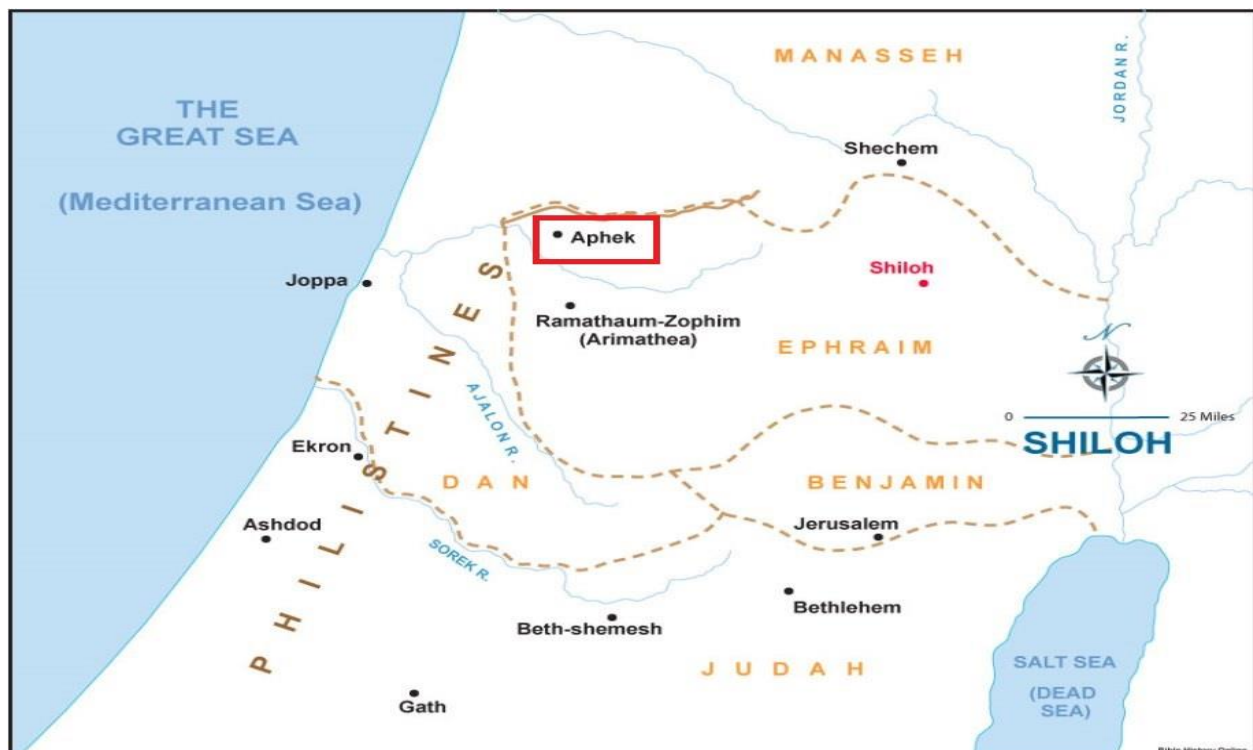
Verses 26-30

²⁶ At the turn of the year, Ben-hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. ²⁷ The sons of Israel were mustered and were provisioned and went to meet them; and the sons of Israel camped before them like two little flocks of goats, but the Arameans filled the country. ²⁸ Then a man of God came near and spoke to the king of Israel and said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Because the Arameans have said, “The Lord is a god of *the* mountains, but He is not a god of *the* valleys,” therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.’” ²⁹ So they camped one over against the other seven days. And on the seventh day the battle was joined, and the sons of Israel killed of the Arameans 100,000 foot soldiers in one day. ³⁰ But the rest fled to Aphek into the city, and the wall fell on 27,000 men who were left. And Ben-hadad fled and came into the city into an inner chamber.

²⁶ At the turn of the year, Ben-hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel.

This time Ben-hadad chose a town on the plain called Aphek. There are several places called Aphek in Israel but it is likely the one in the northwestern region of Ephraim.

See map 2015



²⁸ Then a man of God came near and spoke to the king of Israel and said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Because the Arameans have said, “The Lord is a god of *the* mountains, but He is not a god of *the* valleys,” therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.””

God did not give Israel the victory because they were righteous but because the enemy did not give God the respect that He was due.

²⁹ So they camped one over against the other seven days. And on the seventh day the battle was joined, and the sons of Israel killed of the Arameans 100,000 foot soldiers in one day.

The Israelites were outnumbered 18 to 1 (127,000 men for Syria and 7,000 for Israel) but when God intervenes the numbers become irrelevant. For all the men that didn't show up they lost the opportunity to see a great miracle and didn't get any of the booty that the Syrians had in their possession.

³⁰ But the rest fled to Aphek into the city, and the wall fell on 27,000 men who were left. And Ben-hadad fled and came into the city into an inner chamber.

The text does not say that the wall falling on the soldiers killed the 27,000 men but it goes without saying that that is what happened.

Verses 31-34

³¹ His servants said to him, “Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings, please let us put sackcloth on our loins and ropes on our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he will save your life.” ³² So they girded sackcloth on their loins and *put* ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel and said, “Your servant Ben-hadad says, ‘Please let me live.’” And he said, “Is he still alive? He is my brother.” ³³ Now the men took this as an omen, and quickly catching his word said, “Your brother Ben-hadad.” Then he said, “Go, bring him.” Then Ben-hadad came out to him, and he took him up into the chariot. ³⁴ *Ben-hadad* said to him, “The cities which my father took from your father I will restore, and you shall make streets for yourself in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria.” *Ahab* said, “And I will let you go with this covenant.” So he made a covenant with him and let him go.

³² So they girded sackcloth on their loins and *put* ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel and said, “Your servant Ben-hadad says, ‘Please let me live.’” And he said, “Is he still alive? He is my brother.”

It was foolish to treat Ben-hadad as a brother before the terms of surrender had been determined.

³⁴ *Ben-hadad* said to him, “The cities which my father took from your father I will restore, and you shall make streets for yourself in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria.” *Ahab* said, “And I will let you go with this covenant.” So he made a covenant with him and let him go.

Allowing Ben-hadad to determine the terms of surrender was another mistake.

1. The king of Syria had lost the war so he was in no position to restore the cities that had been taken from Ahab’s father because they were no longer his.
2. Ahab should have said that the people of Syria would build streets in Damascus for him rather than Ben-hadad giving Ahab permission to build the streets.
3. Ahab should have demanded that Syria pay tribute to him and that they return all the gold and silver that Ahab had paid prior to the first battle?

Ahab said, “And I will let you go with this covenant

Ahab should have inquired of the Lord before he decided what he should do with Ben-hadad. And Ahab will pay with his life for not consulting the Lord.

Verses 35-36

³⁵ Now a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to another by the word of the Lord, “Please strike me.” But the man refused to strike him. ³⁶ Then he said to him, “Because you have not listened to the voice of the Lord, behold, as soon as you have departed from me, a lion will kill you.” And as soon as he had departed from him a lion found him and killed him.

It is probably safe to assume that the man who refused to strike the prophet did this out of respect, but since this command came from the Lord he was held responsible for not listening to the word of God.

Verses 37-40

³⁷ Then he found another man and said, “Please strike me.” And the man struck him, wounding him. ³⁹ As the king passed by, he cried to the king and said, “Your servant went out into the midst of the battle; and behold, a man turned aside and brought a man to me and said, ‘Guard this man; if for any reason he is missing, then your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.’ ⁴⁰ While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone.” And the king of Israel said to him, “So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided *it*.”

³⁸ So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes.

This act of deception seems a bit odd coming from a prophet of God but there is no indication in the text that what he did was improper.

³⁹ As the king passed by, he cried to the king and said, “Your servant went out into the midst of the battle; and behold, a man turned aside and brought a man to me and said, ‘Guard this man; if for any reason he is missing, then your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.’

The entire story that was reported to Ahab by the prophet was a lie.

⁴⁰ While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone.” And the king of Israel said to him, “So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided *it*.”

King Ahab had no clue that he had just pronounced & decided his own judgment.

Verses 41-43

⁴¹ Then he hastily took the bandage away from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him that he was of the prophets. ⁴² He said to him, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Because you have let go out of *your* hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.’” ⁴³ So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and vexed, and came to Samaria.

⁴² He said to him, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Because you have let go out of *your* hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.’”

It was Ahab's duty to kill the King of Syria but instead he spared his life. Therefore, Ahab would lose his life along with the lives of his people.

⁴³ So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and vexed, and came to Samaria.

Ahab told the prophet that he had determined his own judgment but when it came to his own actions, that rule seemed unfair. So Ahab went home in a bad mood.