

1. In Chapter 20, we switch views from the "micro to the macro". That just means we stop focusing on the lives of particular believers in God to the life of say all believers. That also means we are going to drop the focus on Elijah and Elisha for a chapter to ask, "What happened to the nation of (Northern) Israel? Now that the drought is over, did they start to trust God again? Did God help them to overcome their worship of the false god Baal and how did he do that?"
  - a) If all of that is confusing to you or you simply don't care what I said so far, let me describe this chapter says another way: First of all, the focus changes for a few chapters. The main point is to remind us that God cares for us as individuals and collectively as a single body of believers. He is constantly working in the background to draw us closer to Him. That's what this chapter teaches. In other words, God is saying to us, despite our problems and despite our situation, I'm still here, I still care about your lives and I am working both on the micro level and on the big scale in order to draw those who I have called closer to Me. In summary, this chapter is an example of how God works in our lives to draw us closer to Him. Oh, and my lesson title is, "How God works on the macro scale in our lives".
2. With that said, let me now focus on the specifics of this chapter. Here are the key events:
  - a) A neighboring group of people organizes an attack on Israel to conquer it. (Gee, what has changed in the last few thousand years? Sorry, couldn't resist throwing that in.)
  - b) This neighboring nation loses badly despite far outnumbering the Israelites.
  - c) Even before the battle begins the leader of this group threatened the king of (North) Israel to say in effect, "Give up now, as you are far outnumbered". At first the king of Israel is willing to surrender but after the foreign king demands more in order to avoid war, the foreign king says in effect, "Don't claim you won until after you've actually won."
  - d) An unnamed prophet (not Elijah or Elisha) tells the king, "Go attack this group a second time because they still refuse to believe "The God" is in control of everything."
  - e) The Israelites defeat again this much larger group a second time in a different location.
  - f) Then the foreign king, who organized the attacks on Israel, agrees to surrender, and give back to Israel the cities taken in the past and let Israel survive and thrive. (This reminds me a little of the modern nation of Israel in 1967 despite the fact that they were greatly outnumbered: They got all of ancient Israel back when attacked by surrounding nations.)
  - g) Meanwhile to finish the story, the focus is then on another unnamed prophet who tells the king of Israel, in essence, that you refused to kill this king who was an enemy of Israel and therefore an enemy of Me (God), and you will die for your lack of obedience.
  - h) To sum it up, God performs miracles on the grand scale to prove to the Israelites and to the surrounding nations that He is God and He cares for that nation. At the same time, God is describing the downfall of the Israelite king who refused to trust in Him and who refused to stop leading the Israelites away from false religions through these events.
3. OK John, good for the ancient Israelites and good for God way back then. Even if this story has parallels to modern Israel, how does any of this affect you and me in our life? Remember the last lesson was about how God helps to restore our faith when all seems lost? Here God is working to restore the faith of all the Israelites despite having a bad king over them. In other words this is an example of how God works on the big (think macro) scale to draw us closer to Him and seek Him as God.
  - a) Suppose you say, I am already seeking God. Why should I care whether or not those who are around me are seeking Him as well? The answer is it's not just about you and me. It's about God's love for people and His desire to show His love to as many as He has called. Like I said in the last lesson, God can't unlove what He loves and He constantly works on our lives on the individual level and the grand scale to draw us closer to Him. Here the focus is on the macro scale. With that said, let's see how God does that in our lives.

4. Chapter 20, Verse 1: Now Ben-Hadad king of Aram mustered his entire army. Accompanied by thirty-two kings with their horses and chariots, he went up and besieged Samaria and attacked it.  
<sup>2</sup> He sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel, saying, "This is what Ben-Hadad says:  
<sup>3</sup> "Your silver and gold are mine, and the best of your wives and children are mine."  
  - a) The first question to ask and answer is, "Who is this Ben-Hadad character and why should I care?" The text says he is king of Aram. To put this in modern English, this foreign king organizes the leaders of 32 city-states (think kings of cities) to organize an attack against the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Aram is essentially southern Syria today. To continue, this large army comes to the border of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Then Ben Hadad sends a message to the king of Israel to say in effect, "You want to avoid war? Great, give me your silver and gold and let me take your best wives and children home as my slaves."  
    - i) Bottom line is the Israelites are about to be attacked here and lose everything.
    - ii) OK, John, too bad for them. How does any of this affect me? Yes there is always a danger of our country being attacked but that is why we have an army to protect our way of life. There is always the danger of others wanting what we have and willing to take it by force. That's the reality of warfare that has existed throughout world history.
    - iii) Even if we don't spend time worrying about being attacked by enemies, there is still the danger of losing our loved ones to whatever danger is out there. I'm not saying we have to be paranoid. I'm just saying life is dangerous and threats to our way of living are real. The point that I do make throughout this lesson is God can handle problems that seem way to big for us to face on our own.
    - iv) Here is this large army on Israel's doorstep demanding whatever they have, not to mention those they love and care about. Now picture whatever it is that we have to face in our lives and having problems bigger than we can handle. That is when God does His best work: When we face issues that are beyond our ability to deal with on our own. This story is a wonderful example of God showing how much He cares for us when we face such issues. With that stated, let's read on and see what happens next.
5. Vs. 4: The king of Israel answered, "Just as you say, my lord the king. I and all I have are yours."  
  - a) John's translation: The king punts. The king of Israel realized the size of the army that is facing his country and says in effect, "You win, we give up". Before we knock the king for his willingness to give up all he owns, consider how you and I might face our own fears. We might say, "This problem is beyond our ability to fix so all we can do is give up". That is what the king does here. The good news that the king has forgotten about, is that there is a God willing to guide us for His glory especially when all seems lost.
  - b) With that said, let's see what happens next.
6. Verse 5: The messengers came again and said, "This is what Ben-Hadad says: 'I sent to demand your silver and gold, your wives and your children. <sup>6</sup> But about this time tomorrow I am going to send my officials to search your palace and the houses of your officials. They will seize everything you value and carry it away.' "  
  - a) John's very loose translation: When the foreign king (Ben-Hadad) found out how easily the king of Israel was willing to give up, this foreign king demanded more. This foreign king said in effect, "Whatever you have of any value me and my army will take it away".
  - b) I don't know what type of crisis you or I have to face today, but it is hard to imagine the fear of losing all one has. I think even the fear of death itself is not as scary as losing the one's we care about or any other thing we may care about. I'm guessing the king and all that were around him were scared to death of losing all they had, but they feared losing their own lives even more. What is worse, is that they feared for their own lives which is why the king was at first, willing to give into their demands. The Israelites saw this large army at their doorstep and out of fear of death, were willing to give up here.

7. Verse 7: The king of Israel summoned all the elders of the land and said to them, "See how this man is looking for trouble! When he sent for my wives and my children, my silver and my gold, I did not refuse him." <sup>8</sup> The elders and the people all answered, "Don't listen to him or agree to his demands."
- a) To explain these verses, we need to remember a few things about the king of Israel. If you didn't know or just forgot, this is king Ahab who's wife was Jezebel. Between the two of them, they got the Nation of Israel to officially turn from God and worship a false deity called Baal. They made the worship of God illegal there and had prophets of God killed. This is the same king that the prophet Elijah organized a big demonstration against a few chapters back to show who was the true God. This is the same king who Elijah told there won't be any rain for a few years to prove who is God.
  - b) An interesting point here is that despite the wickedness of this king, God is still willing to work, not for the sake of the king, but for the sake of His people. It reminds us of the fact that whoever is in charge of our city, state or country is not as significant as the fact that God rules over the whole world and cares about those who do trust in Him. To put all of this stuff another way, God is willing to work to draw us close to Him despite whoever is ruling over us at this time.
  - c) With that said, the king who is afraid of this large army assembled outside of his country asks the elders of Israel what to do. The answer is the Israelite elders said we're willing to fight them, so don't agree to their demands.
    - i) To put this in our terms, the first step to trusting God, is a willingness on our part to take a step of faith and say, "We will trust God to guide us no matter how big is the enemy we face around us". That's the first step being taken here.
8. Verse 9: So he replied to Ben-Hadad's messengers, "Tell my lord the king, 'Your servant will do all you demanded the first time, but this demand I cannot meet.' " They left and took the answer back to Ben-Hadad.
- a) I suspect the king of Israel was torn at this point. He already gave his word to the king of the Syrians (to keep it simple) to his first set of demands, but drew the line at the second set based on the advice of the elders of Israel. To state the obvious, Ben-Hadad will not be happy about this as he knows he has Israel far outnumbered.
9. Verse 10: Then Ben-Hadad sent another message to Ahab: "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if enough dust remains in Samaria to give each of my men a handful." <sup>11</sup> The king of Israel answered, "Tell him: 'One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off.'"
- a) It might be best to use a sports analogy here. Often before a big sporting contest, the two opponents will say negative things about each other in order to psyche themselves up and try to discourage the other side. Today this is called "trash talk". It's like saying, who do you think you are? You can't beat me if you tried! Many people and reporters love this type of talk as it "sells" and it encourages people to actually watch that sporting event.
  - b) As to the specific's, the king of Syria says, "May my gods deal with me if even the dust is left in Samaria (i.e., the Northern Kingdom of Israel) after I get through with it."
    - i) The king of Israel effectively said, "It's not impressive to say it, but to do it". That is what Verse 11 means here. The idea putting on one's armor for battle is not as impressive as the victory one has after one has taken it off.
    - ii) In summary, the negotiation between the two kings is not going well and it has now come down to "trash talk" between the kings.
    - iii) Think about all of this from the perspective of the average Israelite. While the king was busy trash talking, the typical Israelite knew it meant having to go to war and risking losing it all. In other words it is not a spectator-sporting match, it is a fight to the death for both sides. It meant a lot of people praying to God, "OK, are you God or not here? We're in real danger of dying here, and we need Your help!"

10. Verse 12: Ben-Hadad heard this message while he and the kings were drinking in their tents, and he ordered his men: "Prepare to attack." So they prepared to attack the city.
  - a) While all of this trash talking was going back and forth, the foreign king, Ben-Hadad was having a drinking party with his men. Think what grown men do when they are bored: They sit around discussing sex and sports and drink alcohol. That's what I picture here. Then I picture Ben-Hadad who is probably a charismatic leader, as the other kings were willing to follow him, probably raised up his glass and said, "OK men, party time is now over, let's go loot this place and take all that we find desirable!"
11. Verse 13: Meanwhile a prophet came to Ahab king of Israel and announced, "This is what the LORD says: 'Do you see this vast army? I will give it into your hand today, and then you will know that I am the LORD.' "
  - a) The scene in Verse 13 switches back to the Israelite side. Somehow a prophet of God gets to see King Ahab (Israelite king) and say, "God says, you see that huge army out there? I (God) will give them to you and then you and all the Israelites will know that I alone am the true God".
    - i) I'm willing to bet that this unnamed prophet of God was neither Elijah nor Elisha. Despite the fact these two were the main characters in the previous chapter and both will be prominent again in a few chapters, I truly believe this is some other prophet of God speaking here. Why is that important? It shows that God really does have others willing to work for Him despite the fact that Elijah said in the last chapter there is no one but me left on God's side.
    - ii) This whole exchange also shows that God cares about his people. Despite the fact that God told Elijah in the last chapter that He wanted Elijah to go anoint another king over Israel, God still wanted to work through Ahab to show him and all the Israelites that He and He alone is God over the world, not just the God of Israel.
    - iii) It also shows that God still cares about King Ahab turning to Him despite the fact that Elijah was told to anoint his replacement. If nothing else, this reminds us that God not only cares for us, but cares about those who rule over us for our sakes. In other words, if someone is appointed to be our leader, situations like this remind them who is really in charge of us and them. That is why God wanted to show Ahab who is really the leader here.
12. Verse 14: "But who will do this?" asked Ahab. The prophet replied, "This is what the LORD says: 'The young officers of the provincial commanders will do it.' " "And who will start the battle?" he asked. The prophet answered, "You will."
  - a) John's loose translation: The fact that God rules over all of us is true, but there is still an army out there far greater in number than we are who I just "trash talked". What do I do about them? That is why King Ahab asked effectively, "but what about that army?" The prophet of God told the king that the young officers of the army will lead them. Then the prophet tells the king that he will lead the young officers.
  - b) There is an interesting pattern I notice a lot in the bible that I want to point out quickly. It is that when all seems lost, God always raises up someone from the next generation who says in effect, "we won't make the same mistake our parents made". We see that pattern in Kings as every now and then as a good king does appear at times. I point that out here as the text emphasizes the young officers. It is as if to say, "We know that our parents did worship Baal, but we saw God accept Elijah's offering and it's raining again. Besides that, we don't want to die because of the Syrian army, so we're willing to fight them instead of having to turn over all that we own. All we need is you, the king to lead us and God will give us the victory over those who don't trust in Him."
  - c) One gets the impression the king is truly scared of the Syrian army. Here God is helping the king deal with his fears. The text is sort of saying, "The army is ready to fight we just need you to lead us."

13. Verse 15: So Ahab summoned the young officers of the provincial commanders, 232 men. Then he assembled the rest of the Israelites, 7,000 in all. <sup>16</sup> They set out at noon while Ben-Hadad and the 32 kings allied with him were in their tents getting drunk. <sup>17</sup> The young officers of the provincial commanders went out first.
- a) Before I say anything else here, the number 7,000 fascinates me here. If you recall from the last chapter, God told Elijah that there are 7,000 men who did not "kiss" Baal and are still willing to trust in God. Here we have 7,000 people including the young leaders who are willing to take a stand for God. I am saying these are the same 7,000? Don't know. I just know that God is willing to work with whoever is willing to trust in Him to guide his or her life for His glory. Here we have 7,000 willing to go up against a much bigger army lead by the Syrians. (Ok, the text says "Aram", but since we call that area Syrian today, I am using that term to describe the enemy.)
  - b) With that said, I need to talk a little about the time of the attack by the Israelites against this much larger army. Remember that Israel is a hot, dry climate. Hand to hand combat usually happens early in the morning or late in the day so the soldiers won't be as thirsty. My point is the last thing the Syrians expect is an attack at noon. (See Verse 16).
  - c) Since it was the middle of the day, the Syrians themselves didn't expect an attack and they were doing what I said bored men do when there are no women around and no one to go fight: They sit around and get drunk. These Syrian officers were probably thinking, the Israelites would never attack us in the middle of the day, besides we outnumber them by a very large number. Since our soldiers are protecting us, let's drink.
  - d) Again, read of the young officers willing to lead the attack and they go out first. With that said, let's see what happens next.
14. Verse 17 (cont.) Now Ben-Hadad had dispatched scouts, who reported, "Men are advancing from Samaria." <sup>18</sup> He said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; if they have come out for war, take them alive."
- a) My translation: While the leaders of the Syrians were busy drinking, their scouts out on the front line reported back to them that the Israelites are coming at them in mid-day.
  - b) The response of the king is in effect, "whether they have come for peace or for war, just take them alive. I've read two responses to this order:
    - i) The first is that Ben Hadad was drunk, this the conflicting order. That is a real possibility. The other is that he had so much trust in the fact that his army far outnumbered the Israelites, he said in effect, "capture them so we know what is their plan".
  - c) With the battle about to begin, we read on:
15. Verse 19: The young officers of the provincial commanders marched out of the city with the army behind them <sup>20</sup> and each one struck down his opponent. At that, the Arameans fled, with the Israelites in pursuit. But Ben-Hadad king of Aram escaped on horseback with some of his horsemen. <sup>21</sup> The king of Israel advanced and overpowered the horses and chariots and inflicted heavy losses on the Arameans.
- a) These verses describe the battle itself. The simple version is the Israelites win big time despite the fact they were probably heavily outnumbered. The fact that the leaders of the enemy were probably drunk didn't exactly help them. Verse 21 says that the Israelite king did lead the attack. Give him credit here for obeying God's prophet and doing what was told by him to do. The text says many Arameans (again think Syria today) died and many others fled the battle scene. It is another example of how God works for our victories in a situation that seems impossible based on the facts.
  - b) There are some nonbiblical historical records about this king. Those records say in effect that this foreign king was a bad military leader and that is why he lost. My response is that if God says "The victory is mine" I don't care how good or bad this foreign king was as a military leader. Meanwhile, it's time to move on in this story.

16. Verse 22: Afterward, the prophet came to the king of Israel and said, "Strengthen your position and see what must be done, because next spring the king of Aram will attack you again."
  - a) Remember the unnamed prophet of God who told the king of Israel to lead the young army to go fight the Arameans? Well, he's back for an encore appearance. The point here is this guy warns the king of Israel that the king of Aram will attack you again.
  - b) I have to admit I am fascinated by the fact that God helps this Israelite king. This is the same king that married the foreigner Jezebel, made the worship of God illegal, was the reason why it didn't rain for over 3 years in Israel and in the last lesson, God told Elijah to anoint the king who would succeed this king. So if God is so against this Israelite king, why is God helping him in this point in the story?
    - i) The answer is in effect, "it is not the king, it's God's people". God not only wants to prove to the king that God is in charge of our lives, but He also cares about the people that follow Him. If you get nothing else out of this lesson, remember to pray for our local and national leaders, even if we don't like them. The issue is that they rule over us and God is in control of their lives as well as ours. God can work through them to guide our city, state, country or even our church. That is why the New Testament calls on us to pray for those who are over us. (Romans 13:1 is a good example of such a prayer.)
  - c) With that said, the scene now switches from the headquarters of the Israelite king to that of the Syrian king in the next verse.
17. Verse 23: Meanwhile, the officials of the king of Aram advised him, "Their gods are gods of the hills. That is why they were too strong for us. But if we fight them on the plains, surely we will be stronger than they." <sup>24</sup> Do this: Remove all the kings from their commands and replace them with other officers. <sup>25</sup> You must also raise an army like the one you lost--horse for horse and chariot for chariot--so we can fight Israel on the plains. Then surely we will be stronger than they." He agreed with them and acted accordingly.
  - a) These verses teach us a few details about the last battle and about what the Arameans did think of the true God. Let me explain:
    - i) First, the text shows the first battle took place in a hillside location as opposed to on flat level ground. The reason that is important is because horses and chariots don't do well on steep hillsides. That is why the Arameans wanted to go fight the Israelites again on a flat level ground where they thought they could then have the advantage of using horses and chariots in the battle.
    - ii) The second thing we read is the Arameans thought of gods as local deities. Like most of the pagan religions of that day, they believed in many gods. Further, they believed that each god only was good for one place or one type of place. That is why they wanted to fight again, guessing that God can't work in a different place.
    - iii) The third thing the king said was in effect, "Fire all the generals and get others to take their place as obviously it was their fault that we lost the last war." For those who know their history of World War II, Hitler replaced some of his top generals as he thought it was their fault that the Germans lost some key battles. I'm just saying history repeats itself in strange ways.
  - b) I want to deviate here and focus on the phrase, "Their gods are gods of the hills...But if we fight them on the plains, surely we will be stronger than they." (Verse 23.)
    - i) Even among us devout Christians there is a tendency to think that God can only work a certain way. I've heard Christians say things like, "If only there were more persecution of Christians in the United States, then the church would be stronger as has been the case in other times and location in history". My response is that God is the same when Christians are and are not persecuted for their faith. He can and does work in our lives anytime we are willing to trust Him and put our faith in Him. That's a great reminder when we think God can't work "this way" today.

- c) Meanwhile, back to this foreign king. Despite the fact he lost badly in the last battle, the fact remains he lived to fight another day and wanted to attack Israel again. The text says he waited until next spring probably to gather new soldiers for this fight. Earlier I stated I believe this king was probably a great motivator as he encouraged other leaders to agree to fight Israel. Here this king gets other people to join this cause again even after they lost the last battle. The good news for Israel of course, is that God knows all things and made aware to the king of Israel that this king would strike again.
  - d) Before I move on, let me address the issue of why God doesn't warn us of future tragedies like he did the Israelites. Let me use a famous example from recent history. Why did God allow the 9-11 attack to happen? If God loves Christians so much, why didn't he warn the United States ahead of time this might happen? Yes I could spend time arguing about the effort to get the leaders behind this attack before it happened, but that misses the point.
    - i) The best answer I can give is simply that this world is cursed by sin and we are all destined to die at sometime. Recall how Jesus was quoting a newsworthy event of His day asking if those who died because a tower accidentally fell on them were any worse sinners than other people. (See Luke 13:4). The point there is whether or not we like it, we are destined to die at sometime. It's another reminder that God calls us to use the time we are given to make a difference for Him.
    - ii) Coming back to 9-11, the point is we should do all we can to stop evil events from occurring, but we can't stop everything. Therefore, we don't know how and when each of our lives will end. All we can do is use the time God gives to try to make a difference for Him with our lives. Meanwhile, time to go back to ancient history:
18. Verse 26: The next spring Ben-Hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel.<sup>27</sup> When the Israelites were also mustered and given provisions, they marched out to meet them. The Israelites camped opposite them like two small flocks of goats, while the Arameans covered the countryside.
- a) OK, it's time for battle #2 to occur. Just like the king of the Arameans wanted to, a battle took place on an open field. Verse 27 in a colorful way is saying that the Arameans did outnumber the Israelites in a great number. The text says the Israelite camp looked like two small groups of goats in comparison to the Aramean army that covered a very large area. Logic would say even though God warned the Israelite king this event was going to happen, the sheer size of each army would determine the outcome. However, God loves to work in our lives when the odds against us seem impossible.
  - b) To state the obvious, God and the Israelites will win here again. Most of us get the idea by now that God loves to work in impossible situations so that He and He alone will get the credit for the victory. It's a lesson we learn time and time again as we look back at how our lives unfold and see how God has lead us. My question of the moment is why doesn't that happen every time? Why did the events of September 11th have to occur to use the famous example of recent history? To personalize this, why doesn't God warn us about bad things that are going to happen like He did to these Israelites back then? If God loves us, why aren't we warned about what will happen?
    - i) The best answer is sometimes He does and often He does not. Sometimes I find that God's saying to us, "Do you still trust Me now, even when this is happening?"
    - ii) During such times we have to remember the "macro" as well as the "micro". It is very hard to imagine why God would allow some horrible tragedies to occur. All one has to recall is that all things work for God only for those who trust in Him. That's my very short paraphrase of Romans 8:28 and 29. Many of us have seen time and time again, of how God uses horrible tragedies to guide and shape our lives and lives of others around us. That's why one has to keep the "macro" idea in mind not only for this story here in 1st Kings, but for our own lives as well.
    - iii) Speaking of 1st Kings, what do you say we get back to the story:

19. Verse 28: The man of God came up and told the king of Israel, "This is what the LORD says: 'Because the Arameans think the LORD is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the LORD.' "
- a) In this verse we get the unnamed prophet telling the king face to face, "You will win this battle because the other side thinks that I God only can work in specific locations. I need them as well as you to understand that I am in charge of all things at all times. Isn't this in effect a repeat of Verse 23? Yes, but to repeat something is a sign of emphasis. What I'd like you to notice is the word "You" near the end of the verse. In other words, it is not just a matter of telling the enemy that God is control of all things and can work anytime and anywhere in our lives, but it is also to convince the king of that fact. Remember that this king and his wife outlawed the worship of God at one time. I think this is about the effort to remind the king who is really in charge of all things at all times.
  - b) In the last chapter the prophet Elijah (different prophet than the one speaking here) is told to go anoint a future king of Israel. So if that means God is giving up in this king, why is God also bothering to tell this king in effect who he is? The answer is the anointing of the new king hasn't happened yet and in the meantime, this king is still in charge of people who do care about God. Therefore, it's important that God still work through the leaders. To focus on my lesson title again, this is about the "macro" picture that God cares about all people who trust in Him. That means working through the current leadership in order to teach that leader who is really in charge here.
  - c) Bottom line here is that God assures the king that the Israelites will win this battle despite the fact they are far outnumbered if for no other reason to prove to everyone that God is God and is in charge of all situations.
    - i) So does this mean we can and should take on armies or say situations that are a lot bigger than we can face? I think that is God is always looking for people who are willing to step out in faith and trust Him. If we alone were to step forward and go attack 100 people, odds are good we'll lose or get killed. If we say, I'm going to go jump off a cliff and God will rescue me, odds are very good we will die. That's not the situation being taught here. This is about facing our fears when our fears have become much bigger than we can handle. This is about reminding ourselves that God is real, He can work in any situation and can guide us to His glory and guide us over whatever fears we have to face in any situation.
    - ii) In the meantime, there is a battle to fight and it's time to fight it.
20. Verse 29: For seven days they camped opposite each other, and on the seventh day the battle was joined. The Israelites inflicted a hundred thousand casualties on the Aramean foot soldiers in one day. <sup>30</sup> The rest of them escaped to the city of Aphek, where the wall collapsed on twenty-seven thousand of them. And Ben-Hadad fled to the city and hid in an inner room.
- a) The short version here is that the much larger Aramean army and the smaller Israelite army stared at each other for seven days. Then the battle happened and the Israelites won big time and killed over 100,000 of the enemy. Over and above that, another 27,000 of the enemy died when they fled into a nearby city and the wall of the city collapsed on them.
  - b) I don't know how many Israelite solders there were, but the text earlier mentioned 7,000. This is a slaughter of a much smaller group versus a much larger one.
  - c) I was thinking, why did the text mention the seven day factor in Verse 29? Why did the Israelites wait a full week to attack and why did this much larger army sit there for seven days and not attack the Israelites? I suspect part of it is the fear factor. The Arameans did hope that the Israelites saw the much larger army and would just surrender given the fact they were far outnumbered here.
    - i) Then I thought the Israelites needed that time, in effect to prepare for battle. There is an old expression that says, "There are no atheists in fox holes", meaning that in times of war, people pray. I suspect the Israelites did a lot of that here.



- ii) Anyway, after seven days, I suspect the Israelites were thinking, "OK, we've been sitting around for seven days praying a lot. The enemy is not going away and also they have not attacked us yet. It is time for us to trust in God or lose everything.
    - iii) At that point the Israelite army took a step of faith and attacked this much larger army in an open field. They won so big, 100,000 were killed and even the one's that fled away died within a city.
    - iv) Stop and think of the motivation of each side. For the Israelites this was about protecting their families. The Arameans were not home and this was about just gaining prizes for themselves. My guess is the Israelites were more motivated. Still the important thing is about trusting in the true God.
  - d) With that said, I want to come back to the issue of facing our fears. Here the Israelites did defeat an army much larger than them mainly to prove that God is God. Let me give an example from more modern history where God proves He is God again. When Israel first became a nation again in 1947, they won a major war then and again in 1967 even though they were far outnumbered and outgunned. It's another example that God is in control of all situations and He is out to prove that the God of the Jews is also the God of the whole world. I state that here just to show that this ancient event of Northern Israel beating back an enemy far larger repeats itself in modern Israel.
    - i) As to our fears, it shows that by trusting in God we can take on situations that are impossible without Him. Again, the issue is not about blindly attacking an army 10 or 100 times our size. The point is the word of God will stand in any situation no matter how impossible the odds are against it. Just as God proved that roughly 3,000 years ago in this battle, so God did it again in modern Israel.
  - e) Meanwhile, back to this ancient battle. The Israelites won big time and this large did lose both on the battle field and based on where they ran to, to hide. I personally picture so many men running into this city to hide, that many men ran on the wall and that is what caused it to collapse, but who knows.
  - f) The text says Ben-Hadad, the leader of this group, still lived through it and hid in some room of the city that collapsed. At this point, I want to show you how that last chapter does connect to this chapter. In Verse 15 of the last chapter, one of the three people that God told Elijah to anoint was the next king over Aman, yes the same group that Israel just defeated here. The point here is we are reading about how God is in control of all things by having this current king lose badly and having a prophet of God decide who will be their next king. If nothing else, this is a reminder that we need to pray over elections as God Himself ultimately decides who will be our next leaders.
    - i) In the meantime, this Ben-Hadad guy is still alive, even though he has now twice went to war with Israel and lost badly. Remember that this is the same guy who "trashed talked" the King of Israel to start this chapter and demanded all of the valuables within Israel for himself. Now we will read of his surrender.
21. Verse 31: His officials said to him, "Look, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful. Let us go to the king of Israel with sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads. Perhaps he will spare your life." <sup>32</sup> Wearing sackcloth around their waists and ropes around their heads, they went to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant Ben-Hadad says: 'Please let me live.' "
- a) To begin, I need to explain some cultural things. To wear sackcloth is to show sorrow or remorse. It is an uncomfortable garment. The closest comparison I can think of as how at funerals today it is proper to wear black as a sign of remorse. Next this king tied ropes on their heads. This is a way of saying, "We lost, you lead us where you want to". When he (Ben-Hadad) was brought to the king of Israel, Ben said, "I give up, let me live".
  - b) Before we read on, keep in mind that God has already anointed the next king through Elijah and this king didn't believe that the God is in control of the entire world here.

22. Verse 32 (cont.): The king answered, "Is he still alive? He is my brother."
- a) My loose translation: Ahab said just as I was destined to be a king, so was this guy. Yes I know he threatened my life and threatened to take away all that I own of value including my wife and children. Yes I remember how he "trashed talk" me. Still, I beat his army badly in two big battles and now it's time to forgive.
  - b) Whether or not this was God's will for the Israelite king to say this, is coming up.
23. Verse 33: The men took this as a good sign and were quick to pick up his word. "Yes, your brother Ben-Hadad!" they said. "Go and get him," the king said. When Ben-Hadad came out, Ahab had him come up into his chariot. <sup>34</sup> "I will return the cities my father took from your father," Ben-Hadad offered. "You may set up your own market areas in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria." Ahab said, "On the basis of a treaty I will set you free." So he made a treaty with him, and let him go.
- a) You know I can't resist giving my own loose translation here: "Dear king of Israel. I'm sorry about the whole war thing and threatening to take all that you own. However now that I have lost badly, let me make it up to you. I will return all the cities that at one time were controlled by Israel, but my father took away in another war. I will also let you sell your goods in the big city of Damascus. So what do you say your highness, will you let me live on those terms?" Then out of greed, King Ahab said yes.
  - b) On the surface, this all seems well and good. The side that opposed God lost badly and the king of Israel was willing to forgive at this point. The question of course, was it God's will to let this man live and Israel have this "booty" as a reward? Here is where all of this is deceiving: Remember that the king of Israel and his wife Jezebel outlawed the worship of God in Israel. Now this king of a foreign country is saying, not only let me live but let the influence of foreign gods be around by us "mixing together". To say this another way don't you Israelites just live all among yourselves worshipping God, come mix with us.
  - c) Doesn't God want us to be a good influence to the world? Yes. (See Matthew 28:19.) At the same time, He also calls us to separate ourselves from the world (See John 15:19). So how do we do both? The answer is to not live like the world around us and based on our love for one another, we let that love be our witness to others. Ben-Hadad is effectively saying, "live like us and you'll be rich." That's why God effectively condemned this king in the last chapter when He told Elijah to go anoint the next king of Aram as well as anoint the next king of Israel. One way the king of Israel failed here is he refused to eliminate what can get us to compromise our faith in God.
  - d) With that harsh reality stated, the story will now switch to some unnamed prophets and how they are going to deal with the Israelite king and his lack of trust in God.
24. Verse 35: By the word of the LORD one of the sons of the prophets said to his companion, "Strike me with your weapon," but the man refused. <sup>36</sup> So the prophet said, "Because you have not obeyed the LORD, as soon as you leave me a lion will kill you." And after the man went away, a lion found him and killed him.
- a) To explain this, we have to talk a little about where these prophets come from. Back when Queen Jezebel outlawed the worship of God in the kingdom of (North) Israel, we learned in the last lesson that a servant of that king secretly hid 100 prophets of God to keep them alive during the famine. I don't know if this group of prophets had a way of dressing that everyone realized they were prophets, or maybe they had some body mark to distinguish themselves. I state this, because whoever these prophets were, they got access to the king and the king was able to recognize them as being prophets of God. Keep the fact that they were recognizable as we go through the last nine verses of this chapter, as well as these verses here.
  - b) Here one prophet of God asked another one to hurt him somehow. The second prophet who should have known this is somehow God ordained, refused to do so. Because he did not want to hurt his friend, a lion killed him soon after that failure.

- c) Ok, we have to admit this is strange. One prophet refused to hurt the other and he was killed by a lion soon afterwards. You may recall from an earlier chapter in 1st Kings that another prophet refused to do what God told him to do and he was also killed by a lion. (See 1st Kings 13:24).
  - i) Let me put this story this way: There is a huge price to be paid to be a prophet of God. As I have stated before, the word prophet literally means to "speak first". It is not about predicting the future as it speaking God's word to others. If you are thinking of say teaching a bible study or being a minister, consider carefully what the cost of disobedience is. This is not a salvation issue. The issue is about being a good witness for God. When we fail, we can lose the opportunities that God does give us to be His witness. When this companion of God failed to do what it is God called him to do, he was killed for that lack of obedience.
  - ii) Meanwhile, back to our story:
- 25. Verse 37: The prophet found another man and said, "Strike me, please." So the man struck him and wounded him.
  - a) The prophet who wanted to be wounded, found another man. Other versions of the bible imply that this second man was also of the "prophet school". The second man probably is thinking, "I'm not crazy about the idea of being eaten by a lion, so I'll do what he asks!"
  - b) Now we have the prophet of God who made this request, looking like he wanted to look, wounded. Even before we get to the rest of the story, consider how being God's prophet means once again we have to pay a big price for that privilege.
- 26. Verse 38: Then the prophet went and stood by the road waiting for the king. He disguised himself with his headband down over his eyes.<sup>39</sup> As the king passed by, the prophet called out to him, "Your servant went into the thick of the battle, and someone came to me with a captive and said, 'Guard this man. If he is missing, it will be your life for his life, or you must pay a talent of silver.'<sup>40</sup> While your servant was busy here and there, the man disappeared."
  - a) You have to admit, this last part of the chapter is strange. We went from describing a war between Israel and another kingdom to this strange story about a group of prophets for God wanting to hurt each other and causing the death of another one for disobedience.
  - b) With that said, we'll now read how and why these stories connect to each other.
  - c) The wounded prophet waited for the king to show up. He somehow disguised himself as it's assumed without that disguise the king would recognize him as a prophet of God.
    - i) That's why I gave that little speech earlier about somehow these prophets either dressed differently or had some distinguishing look so that the king would know they are truly God's prophets. Therefore this prophet put a bandage on his head to cover part of the wound for this disguise.
    - ii) With that said, we're ready to talk about what he actually said to the king.
  - d) At this point, the servant made up a story. The story effectively said, "When I was fighting in the war, I was told to guard a prisoner. If I failed to guard him, it would cost me either my life or a talent (one persons annual earning) in silver. The bottom line is I failed, and I'm now awaiting for you the king to deliver my sentence.
- 27. Vs. 40 (cont.): "That is your sentence," the king of Israel said. "You have pronounced it yourself."
  - a) The bottom line here is the prophet did what God wanted him to do, have the king tell him what was the punishment for the disobedient soldier and for the king's punishment.
  - b) To put it another way, the king was guilty of not wiping out this foreign king who did declare that God is a local deity that can be defeated. As the leader of God's people God wanted the Israelite king to kill this foreign king as he was either to defeat the Israelites or at the least get them to compromise in what they believe. That's why God effectively put a death sentence on this foreign king.
  - c) With that said, this prophet in a clever way, got the king to say, "If you were guilty to let the enemy of God go, you deserve to die yourself!" That's the point here.

28. Verse 41: Then the prophet quickly removed the headband from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets.<sup>42</sup> He said to the king, "This is what the LORD says: `You have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people.'" <sup>43</sup>Sullen and angry, the king of Israel went to his palace in Samaria.
- a) Like I have been stating, I believe somehow the prophets looked different enough that without the bandage, the king of Israel could recognize this man as one of God's prophets.
  - b) Now the prophet is going to explain how this little parable applies to the king himself. The short version is that God has already pronounced judgment on this foreign king. That is why Elijah in the last chapter was told to go anoint the next king of that area. That is why God wanted King Ahab to go kill this guy. This foreign king first wanted to wipe out Israel by demanding everything of value and enslave their population. Then after he lost two wars with Israel, he wanted the Israelites to compromise my mixing both groups together. One can sort of see this chapter as a type of spiritual warfare. If the forces that oppose God can't defeat us, they at least want to get us to compromise our lifestyle.
    - i) Therefore, the final judgment on the king of Israel is that he too, is now sentenced to die for failing to be obedient to God Himself.
    - ii) So if God hated this king of Israel so much, why not just strike him dead? By this strange method, the king and all of Israel now knew who was really in charge and why it is that judgment was pronounced on this king.
  - c) OK John, this is a cute ancient bit of history. However, we're not living in Israel nor are we called to be a prophet of God like one of these people in Israel. However, if we do call ourselves a Christian, that means God has called us to be a living witness for Him. God wants us to use our lives to make a difference for Him. There are spiritual enemies that want to defeat us or at the least get us to compromise with our faith like this foreign king. The point is God wants us to stick close to Him not that He needs our affection, but so we rely upon His power in order to make that difference for Him in this world. That is what King Ahab failed to do. That is why God pronounced a death sentence on Him. God did raise this king up to be a witness for Him and this king will soon lose his "ministry" as he compromised with what God desired of Him.
  - d) Let me end by reminding us what was God's goal over the last few chapters. To get all or most of the Israelites to stop worshipping a false deity called Baal and come back to God. God is doing that by having prophets (think people willing to dedicate their lives to Him) then lead others back to Him. That is what Elijah did in the previous chapters. That is what these unnamed prophets are doing in this chapter and that is what God calls you and me to do as a witness for Him. That is how God was working behind the scenes to deal with His appointed leaders, the leaders of the enemies and even His own prophets.
    - i) The lesson to learn from this chapter is that God is working both on the macro (large scale) and the micro (our individual lives) to draw us close to Him. That way we can draw upon His power and rely upon His word in order to make a difference for Him in this world. On that thought, let's take that concept to God in my closing prayer.
29. Father, the most precious thing You give us is our time. May we use time that in order to make a difference for You in this world. Help us to trust in You so that You can give us the power and the boldness to be a witness for You in this world. God, at times, situations seem way too big for us to face on our own. At such times, help us to remember that You are there, You are guiding us and You want to lead us for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.