

# THE DAYS OF ELIJAH

## LESSON 7: JEHOVAH JUDGES HIS PEOPLE (1KINGS 20)

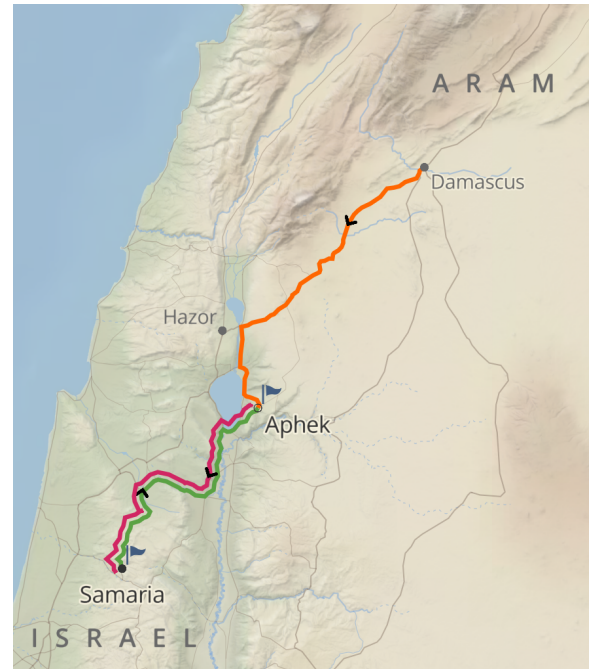
The days of Elijah and Elisha was a time when Israel forsook her Lord for other gods. They did this in spite of Jehovah revealing Himself to be the one, true God (1Kings 19) and in spite of the fact that the Lord had provided for her in the past, and continued to do so for His faithful ones. And because Israel had rejected the Lord as her God, she would be judged by Him! Our study began with one of God's judgments on Israel, when He proclaimed a drought by His servant Elijah (1Kings 17.1). More significant for this and future lessons are the Lord's words to Elijah in 1Kings 19.15-17, "The Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. "It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death." The Lord's judgment on Israel was coming, and He would utilize various men to bring that judgment about.

1Kings 20 recounts two wars Israel had with Aram (Syria) during the reign of Ahab. While Israel would be victorious in these battles, they foreshadow the judgment which was swiftly coming on the house of Ahab and ultimately on all of Israel. Beginning with this chapter, Aram becomes a thorn in Israel's side. The king of Aram may have set his sights on Israel for a couple of reasons: first, Ahab's alliance with Phoenicia (see 1Kings 16.31) may have restricted the Arameans access to the lucrative trade markets of Phoenicia. Second, the Assyrian empire was growing during the reign of Shalmaneser III (859-829 BC) and this likely meant that Aram had little prospect of expanding to the north. Thus, they looked to the south and to Israel.

### NOTES FROM THE TEXT:

- Vs. 1:
  - » Ben-Hadad, "Aramean history at this time is still in need of much clarification, with at least part of the problem caused by several rulers with the name of Ben-Hadad ("son of [the god] Hadad")... The first Ben-Hadad has been referred to earlier in chapter 15 and ruled during the first part of the ninth century, though no precise dating is possible. In 2 Kings 8 the king murdered by Hazael (about 842) is named Ben-Hadad, and Hazael is later succeeded by a king named Ben-Hadad." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
  - » 32 kings, "These kings were not heads of state but tribal chieftains who roamed with semi-independence in the area of Damascus. Damascus was a great oasis south-east of the southern extremity of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range. Tribesman of the north Arabian steppe roamed and settled in the area of Damascus. The title "king of Aram" (v. 1) refers to the control Ben-Hadad has in mustering these chieftains against Ahab. Aram is an ethnic rather than a geographic term, and the "kings" are rulers of various tribes or confederacies." (NIV Application Commentary)

- Vs. 3,
  - » “Such was the case in Esarhaddon’s and Ashurbanipal’s destruction of enemy kingdoms: ‘I carried off his wife, his children, the personnel of his palace, gold, silver ... many valuables.’ The Egyptian victors did the same. Amenhotep II boasts of seizing wives, children, animals, and ‘all of their property without end.’” (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary)
  - » “The resulting vassal relationship would involve members of Ahab’s family being taken as hostages to insure that the terms were met. Assyrian practice of this time was to take princes hostage to provide incentive that good behavior would result, and here the Arameans are doing the same.” (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 12, it is thought by many that rather than Ben-Hadad being right outside the walls of Samaria, he and his troops were based in Succoth in the Jordan Valley (the word is similar to the word translated “temporary shelter”)
- Vs. 15, the 7000 would not have been all the fighting men in Israel, but could have been all who were readily available. Point is that the Lord does not rely on numbers (see Judges 7.2)
- Vs. 22,
  - » “turn of the year” would be during the spring, the usual time for military expeditions.
  - » “The Arameans would be unsatisfied with their geographical limitations until better access to the ports of the Mediterranean were secured. Israel alone stood in their way, and hence the Arameans would engage in battle again, next time in more favorable terrain closer to the Damascus heartland.” (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 23, this was in keeping with pagan beliefs that deities were localized. Samaria, located in the hill country, was protected by a god of the hills, or so they thought.
- Vs. 24,
  - » “The tactics that will be used for the second campaign are significantly different. In the first round the Aramean coalition attacked Samaria directly. This was intended as siege warfare. In the second phase the emphasis was not on starving the people out or on breaching the walls of a city, but on pitched battle in open terrain where the Arameans intended to take full advantage of their chariotry and cavalry. Whether because of the different battle tactics or because of the failure of the first campaign, the Arameans assigned a new group of field commanders and filled the ranks with new recruits.” (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
  - » “The Aramean king is advised to abandon the ineffective alliances with area chieftains and bring his military forces directly under his control, with officials he appoints himself. He further needs to tally a force equal to the troops and cavalry that desert him.” (NIV Application Commentary)



- Vs. 31, "Ben-Hadad is left with no alternative but to appeal to treaty loyalty, which he expects from Ahab (20:31). 'Merciful' is a covenant term denoting loyalty to a relationship. Submission, made evident in their garments, is the basis of appeal to someone who can respect agreements. Course black cloth attached to the waist is a sign of penitence, a sign of suspension of normal activities to focus on critical relational matters. A rope on the head indicates servitude, either as a prisoner of war or as someone who has given up his rights to one who has the power of life and death." (NIV Application Commentary)
- Vss. 32-33, "By referring to Ben-Hadad as his brother and taking him up into his chariot, Ahab is expressing his willingness to renegotiate their former relationship. It is likely that previously Ahab was considered a vassal to Ben-Hadad, in which case there would have been a suzerainty treaty between them. This would have required Ahab to pay tribute and be under the general authority of Aram. In this new "brother" relationship there would be a parity treaty between them that would not require tribute. It would put them on equal terms, providing mutual support militarily and opening up trade routes and merchant opportunities on an equal footing. Ahab's leniency is seen in his settling for equal status rather than pushing his advantage to make Ben-Hadad his vassal." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 34, "One of the actions taken when a major city came under the control of a new king was to construct a marketplace for his merchants in a square set up in his honor. A colony of merchants would then take up residence in the city to carry on their trade." (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- Vs. 39, a talent of silver was ~ 100 times the price of a slave according to the Law (Exodus 21.32).
- Vs. 40, interesting that Ahab who had just shown mercy to Ben-Hadad his foe, has no mercy for his own.
- Vs. 42, "The doctrine of 'holy war'—wars where God acts as the warrior in defeating the enemy—requires that the spoils belong entirely to God (as at Jericho, cf. Josh. 6:18). A prisoner in such a case cannot be treated as common property; anything so devoted cannot be sold or redeemed by substituting something else (cf. Lev. 27:28; Deut. 7:2; 20:16–17). According to prophetic theology, the Aramean king is under such a ban (1 Kings 20:42), and it is not Ahab's prerogative to make a treaty with him." (NIV Application Commentary)

## TAKEAWAYS:

Twice Ahab was told that the Lord would grant him victory so that he would "know that I am the Lord" (vss. 13,28). Clearly, the Arameans did not know the Lord, for they thought he was localized deity (vs. 23), but the tragedy is that Israel did not know the Lord either. It is interesting that during the Exodus, the Lord repeatedly acted so that Israel would "know that I am the Lord"...

- this was to be Moses' message to Israel (Exodus 6.7)
- the plagues were so the Egyptians and Israelites would know that Jehovah is the Lord (Exodus 7.5,17; 10.2)
- the Red Sea crossing would confirm that Jehovah is the Lord (Exodus 14.18)
- Israel was fed daily with bread from heaven so they could "know that I am the Lord" (Exodus 16.12)

Yet, during the days of Elijah Israel did not know that Jehovah was Lord (see 1Kings 18.36), and even though the Lord gave Ahab victory twice, his treaty with Ben-hadad proved that he still didn't know the Lord. Tragically, Israel would finally come to understand that Jehovah is Lord, but it would take captivity for them to finally grasp the lesson (Ezekiel 6)