

“Making Friends with the Enemy”  
1 Kings 20  
(Preached at Trinity, September 26, 2021)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Chapters 17-19** focus on Elijah's mission as God's prophet; a mission of proclaiming God's judgment upon an idolatrous people and an idolatrous king.  
But now as we come to final chapters of 1 Kings, **Chapters 20-22**, the focus turns more particularly to Ahab's failures as a king and as a person.  
These chapters will reveal Ahab's repeated opposition to the Word of God.
2. **Verse 1** opens with news that Ben-hadad had gathered his army and alliance of 32 kings against Ahab in Samaria.
  - A. We were introduced to the name Ben-hadad in **Chapter 15**.  
Aram is the Biblical name for Syria. Syria and Israel have always been in conflict. In **Chapter 15** we read that Asa, king of Judah, and Baasha, king of Israel were at war. Asa emptied the treasury of the Temple and bribed Ben-hadad to break his alliance with Baasha and join with Asa. Asa had foolishly made an alliance with the enemy rather than trusting in the provision of God.
  - B. This was Ben-hadad I, who was probably the father of this Ben-hadad here in **Chapter 20**, Ben-hadad II.  
This is the meaning of the reference in **Verse 34**:  
**1 Kings 20:34 NAU** - "The cities which my father took from your father I will restore"
3. This chapter opens with the Aramean king sending messengers to Ahab demanding full surrender—"your silver, gold, wives, and children are mine." Elijah and Elisha are absent from this account.  
Ahab feels he has little choice but to comply. Ahab's surrender was so easy Ben-hadad must have figured he must have been too lenient and so he comes back with more stringent terms—"I'll enter your houses and take away whatever I feel like taking."  
Ahab was not willing to go this far.
4. Ahab pretended to be bold, but he was really helpless against the force of the Arameans. Then when all seemed hopeless God sends His prophet:  
**1 Kings 20:13 NAU** - "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.'"
  - A. This is a surprising act of grace and mercy from the hand of God. We've seen Ahab and Jezebel's idolatry and persistent rebellion against God. Ahab doesn't deserve any mercy at all. We would expect the Aramean's to destroy Israel. Once again, God is remaining faithful to His covenant promises.
  - B. We should note, the prophet came at God's initiative and design.  
Ahab was not seeking God nor trusting in God. It was all of God, working to turn the hearts of His people.  
"and you shall know that I am the LORD."

- C. This was also at the heart of God's powerful display on Mount Carmel.  
**1 Kings 18:37-39 NAU** - "Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and *that* You have turned their heart back again." <sup>38</sup> Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. <sup>39</sup> When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God."
- D. We should also note the contrast:  
**1 Kings 20:2 NAU** - "Thus says Ben-hadad . . . Your silver and your gold are mine"  
**1 Kings 20:13 NAU** - "Thus says the LORD . . . I will deliver them into your hand today"  
 Whose word do you suppose carried the greater authority?  
**1 Kings 20:20-21 NAU** - "the Arameans fled and Israel pursued them, and Ben-hadad king of Aram escaped on a horse with horsemen. <sup>21</sup> The king of Israel went out and struck the horses and chariots, and killed the Arameans with a great slaughter."
5. As we will see, great miraculous displays are not sufficient to change the hearts of men. This was what God taught Elijah on Mount Horeb. God wasn't in the rending wind or the shattering earthquake or the blazing fire but in the gentle blowing of His Spirit through the Word of God.  
 This is the teaching of **Chapter 20**. Ahab witnessed the overpowering display of God's mercy and walked away unaffected.
6. Of course, God's power is not only for believers. All should bow before the mighty hand of God.
- A. Like Ahab, Ben-hadad remained unaffected. Ahab's problem was his obstinate hatred of God's rule. For Ben-hadad it was a case of bad theology.  
**1 Kings 20:23 NAU** - "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."  
 In other words, there were some areas beyond the reach of God's power.
- B. Don't laugh. How many professing Christians trust the eternal condition of their soul to God but don't really trust Him with their life.  
 He is the God of eternal salvation but not a God involved with our earthly life. Dale Ralph Davis wrote: "And then one sometimes meets this attitude in a small church of forty or fifty members, most of whom are age sixty and above: we can't expect God to do anything in us or among us; we are growing older, we've no younger couples or children; we can't muster up any revival starter-kit like larger churches can do. We can't expect God to stir us—he's not a god of the valley."<sup>1</sup>
- C. God proved Himself Lord over all the earth. Ben-hadad strengthened himself again for battle so that God would again prove Himself mighty.  
**1 Kings 20:26 NAU** - "At the turn of the year, Ben-hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel."

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<sup>1</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 287.

7. **Verse 27** records that the "Arameans filled the country."  
And again, God declared He would defeat the Arameans.  
**1 Kings 20:28 NAU** - "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."
- 1 Kings 20:29 NAU** - "and the sons of Israel killed of the Arameans 100,000 foot soldiers in one day."
8. Again, it was a terrible defeat for the Arameans and Ben-hadad fled. He sent his messengers again to Ahab seeking peace. No longer was he the proud king demanding Ahab's surrender. But he was still Ahab's enemy, make no mistake. He was ready to replace force with show of submission. His servants dressed up for the part with sackcloth and the garb of servants.  
**1 Kings 20:32 NAU** - "Ben-hadad says, 'Please let me live.'"
9. Ahab responded in a most surprising way. And we should note he didn't seek counsel from God. **1 Kings 20:32 NAU** - "Is he still alive? He is my brother."  
A. Ahab declares him to be his brother king. He is proud to make an alliance with Ben-hadad, the formerly powerful king.  
B. Ben-hadad was the enemy of God's people. This one who just a few days earlier demanded Ahab's total surrender and submission Ahab now refers to as "my brother."  
C. We always have to be careful about over-spiritualizing the Old Testament narratives. But these final three chapters are given to us as a display of Ahab's continuing rebellion against the Word of God. We must not fail to comprehend it as a warning to us.
10. I want to apply this to us as a testimony of the importance of maintaining warfare against our spiritual enemies. We must not make allegiance with them. We must not give the enemy safe harbor.
- I. The Christian life is a life of war with real enemies  
A. Satan continues as a mighty foe  
1. We must maintain vigilance against his lies and deceptions.  
2. His temptations never cease.  
*For still our ancient foe  
does seek to work us woe;  
his craft and power are great,  
and armed with cruel hate,  
on earth is not his equal.*  
3. We must never lay down our weapons of warfare. We must never make friends with the enemy.  
B. This present world is also a powerful foe  
1. It is referred to as a kingdom of darkness  
**Ephesians 5:8-11 NAU** - "for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth), <sup>10</sup> trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them;"

2. We are never to set our affections upon this world  
**1 John 2:15 NAU** - "Do not love the world nor the things in the . If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

C. We also battle against our own flesh

1. Our flesh is at war with our spiritual life  
**Galatians 5:17 NAU** - "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another"  
**1 Peter 2:11 NAU** - "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul."
2. The Christian must maintain this spiritual war  
**2 Corinthians 10:3-4 NAU** - "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup> for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

II. God's people must never make friends with the enemy

A. This was Ahab's great sin

1. Ben-hadad was not his friend. He was an enemy. God delivered the enemy into his hand and the enemy needed to be destroyed.
2. This was always the rule of Canaan  
**Exodus 23:31-33 NAU** - "I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you. <sup>32</sup> "You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. <sup>33</sup> "They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for *if* you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."
3. This has always been the rule for God's people. We're not talking about actual battles against actual people. We are talking about actual warfare against actual philosophies and worldviews against the Word of God.  
**2 Corinthians 10:4-6 NAU** - "for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. <sup>5</sup> *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, <sup>6</sup> and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete."
4. Ahab made friends with the enemy  
**1 Kings 20:34 NAU** - "*Ahab said*, "And I will let you go with this covenant." So he made a covenant with him and let him go."

B. God's rule for us is absolute separation and absolute division

1. Making friendship with the world is to make war against the holiness of God.  
**James 4:4 NAU** - "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

2. We must maintain a strict division  
**2 Corinthians 6:14-17 NAS** - "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? <sup>15</sup> Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup> Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>17</sup> "Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you."

C. Ben-hadad was God's enemy

1. God's enemies must be our enemies. Ben-Hadad was under the curse of God.
2. Ahab treated God's enemy as a brother.  
 Like the guards of antiquity, to allow a prisoner to go free was to forfeit your own life. It was Ahab's own rule, and he broke it.

Conclusion:

1. The chapter ends with the Word of the Lord pressed upon Ahab. God sends his prophet. And once again, Ahab despises the Word of the Lord.  
**1 Kings 20:42-43 NAU** - "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.'" <sup>43</sup> So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and vexed, and came to Samaria."
2. The word for "sullen" means resentful. There was no change, no repentance. Only resentment. He remained obstinate towards God.  
 And that is the great crime of humanity and remains true today. They resent the Word of God.