



1 Kings 19-20

Tape #7110
I Kings 19-20
By Chuck Smith

Shall we turn now in our Bibles to I Kings, chapter nineteen. As we work our way through the Bible. Elijah had come on the scene very suddenly with an announcement that it wasn't going to rain again until he said so. Then he disappeared. He was gone for three and a half years. King Ahab searched all over for him. The longer the drought went on, the more desperate Ahab became, to find this man. "Who was that man that said that, and where did he go?" Well we know that he went first to the brook Cherith, where he hid and was fed by the ravens. Then later, over to the area of Tyre, and Sidon, where he was taken care of by a widow woman.

But, he suddenly, after three and a half years appears on the scene again. Ahab said, "Oh, I've finally caught you, you've troubled Israel long enough". And he said, "No you're the one that has troubled Israel, because you have brought into them the worship of Baal, and Ashtoreth. You've killed the prophets of God". So he said, "Gather together all of Israel, and the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Ashtoreth, and let them build an altar unto their god, and place a sacrifice on it, but not put any fire under the altar. And I will build an altar unto Jehovah, and place a sacrifice thereon, and we will pray to our gods, and let the god that answers by fire, be God".

So Ahab assembled together the tribes of Israel, they came to mount Carmel, and there the eight hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and Ashtoreth. Built their altar, they began to pray unto Baal to send the fire. All morning long they prayed. They leaped on the altar, they were filled with enthusiasm. But, nothing happened, and about noon, Elijah began to tease them a bit, and said, "You know I'll bet your god is asleep, or on vacation perhaps. Maybe you should cry a little louder". So they began to cry louder, and cut themselves, and leap on the altar. And, still no response. About the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah said, "Okay fellows, you've had your turn. Now", he said, "Dig a trench around my altar". He repaired the altar of Jehovah, and they dug a trench around it, and he said, "Now take and pour four barrels of water on it", they did. He said, "Do it again!", they did it again. "Do it again!", they did it again until the trench was filled with water.

Then Elijah prayed unto Jehovah, and he said, "Lord that these people may know, that I have done this at your word, that I am your prophet, and that they may know that you are the only true God, send the fire and consume the sacrifice". And the fire of God came from heaven, not only consumed the sacrifice, it consumed the rock altar itself. And it licked up the water that was in the trenches, and the people began to cry, "Jehovah is God! Jehovah is God!".

Riding the crest, the momentum that was going, Elijah said, "Gather together the prophets of Baal, and Ashtoreth, and bring them down to the brook Kishon", and there Elijah took the sword, and he killed the eight hundred and fifty false prophets. Then he said to king Ahab, "Get home as fast as you can, because it's going to start raining". And Elijah prayed. He prayed seven times, then they saw the cloud arising out of the Mediterranean, about the size of a man's hand, and Elijah said, "Get moving or you're going to get wet". And he ran before the chariot of Ahab, to the city of Jezreel, which is on the eastern end of the valley of Megiddo. And, then we come to chapter nineteen.

And Ahab told his wife Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword (19:1).

Now Jezebel was really the wicked influence in the kingdom. She was the daughter of a pagan king. She had grown up with the worship of Baal, and Ashtoreth. She was the one who brought the worship of the pagan gods into the worship of the Israeli people. It was through her influence that the prophets of God were slain. In the new testament, she is used as a symbol for evil, as God addresses the church at Thyatira. In Revelation, chapter two, He says, "You have that woman Jezebel, who caused my servants to commit fornication, and to worship the strange gods". So the ungodly influence of Jezebel. Now, her husband tells

her, “Hey that prophet Elijah killed the eight hundred and fifty prophets, those of Baal, and Ashtoreth”.

And Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I don't make your life like the life of one of those prophets by tomorrow about this time (19:2).

“I'm gonna get you man! Tomorrow at this time, you're dead.” I mean it was just a real threat from this woman Jezebel, against this prophet Elijah. Now, the Bible tells us that Elijah was a man of like passions, just like we are. Again, whenever God uses a person in a special way, we somehow build around them an aura of, of, sort of out of the ordinary, beyond my reach, kind of a, you know, we sort of put them on a pedestal. We make saints out of them, or we don't think of them in terms of like ourselves. You don't think of the pope like yourself. He's just a man. You don't think of him like that. You think, “Oh my, you know, the Pope!”, you know and you, you know, and it's sort of amazing. You think of Billy Graham as, “Oh Billy Graham”, a man mightily used of God.

The reason why Billy Graham is so mightily used of God, is the humility of this man. He's a man, just like you, just like me. He is just so ordinary that he is disarming! It's, he is, when he gets in the pulpit, he's anointed, and we see the anointing of God upon him. With that anointing of God, the power of God that is in his life, we think, “Oh, he must never have any problems. I'll bet he never has bad breath”, or, “He probably never brushes his teeth”, or, “He doesn't do the ordinary things that ordinary people do”. But that's not so. He's a very ordinary man, just like you, just like, Elijah was a man, just like you, just like me. Even though God worked so mightily in his life, he was just an ordinary person.

For God uses just ordinary persons to do His will. All of you have the same God, and the same power of the Spirit that Peter had, that John had, that Paul had. These were just men that God used. God hasn't stopped using men and women. God will use us, if we will just but yield our lives to the Lord. I'm glad that the bible is very frank, and does show to us the weaknesses also, of these great men of God. Lest we would be so prone to put them on a pedestal, that we would think that their feats are totally unattainable by us, because we know how frail and human we are.

Here was Elijah with a contest, with these prophets of Baal, and Ashtoreth, standing up against them. Brave, challenging them, you know the whole scene, now here's Jezebel saying, “Tomorrow at this time man, I'm gonna have your head!”. And he gets frightened. He starts to run. And he ran south, through the land of Israel, through the land of Judah, all the way to the southern end of Judah, to Beersheba.

When he saw that, he arose, went for his life, came to Beersheba, which belongs to the tribe of Judah, and there he left his servant. But he himself continued to run for another day, [on into the Negev???,] the journey into the wilderness, and he came and he sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and he said, It's enough; O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers (19:3-4).

“God, I don't want to live anymore.” It's interesting how that fear, often transmits into despair and despondency. We give into fear. He gave into fear. The threat of Jezebel, and as a result, a lack of faith. You see, fear and faith are mutually exclusive. You have real faith in God, you're not gonna fear. Fear is a sign of a lack of faith in God. Trusting in myself. So, he desires to die. He's discouraged. He probably had felt that the victory of God on mount Carmel, would not only convince Ahab, but would also convince his wife Jezebel. He figured when Ahab told Jezebel how the fire came down, consumed the sacrifice, the altar, licked up the water, that surely Jezebel would also become a believer in Jehovah, and be converted. But such was not the case. She vows vengeance against the prophet of God. And, discouraged that the revival that he was hoping for, really didn't take place.

There was an emotional experience among the people, but not really a heart changing experience. So many times we can have emotional experiences, but they can be shallow. They're not necessarily a deep experience with God. If you have a deep experience with God, it's gonna effect your heart. The volitional area of your life. So he is here requesting to die.

And he lay down and went to sleep under the juniper tree, and an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and there was a cake that was baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid down again (19:5-6).

We remember how that Jesus called His disciples to come and eat at the sea of Galilee, and when they

came to the shore, there were fish on a bed of coals. Here the Lord is inviting, the angel of the Lord is inviting Elijah to his table that he had prepared, the bread that was baked on these coals. God has interesting ways. Ways of providing for His people, ways of which we are not familiar.

One of our problems is as we look at a situation, and as we try to analyze, and figure out the answers to the problems, as we have thought, "Well if God will just do this, and this, then my problems can be solved". We then are prone to pray that God will follow our instructions, the way we figured out and worked out the solution. God, so often times has a much simpler answer, and God's ways are not our ways. His ways are beyond our finding out, and God has resources that we know nothing about.

God isn't confined to one particular way, and this is the problem of denominationalism. They're usually say, "This is the way that God works", you know, and they've got God in this little rut, you know. Thus we develop the denomination over the way God worked in our lives. You know, you take the way Jesus treated the lepers, or treated the blind people, in the healing of the blind. He didn't follow a certain pattern. To some He just spoke the word of faith, to others He laid His fingers upon their eyes. To some He made mud out of His spit, rubbed it in their eyes, and told them to go wash. You have actually cause, for three denominations. He touched me, He didn't touch me, He put mud in my eye. You know. This is the way God worked in my life. But God doesn't confine Himself to one particular method, or one particular way.

With Elijah, He provided for him in different ways, at the brook Cherith, with the ravens. In Zarephath, with the barrel of meal, and the cruse of oil that did not waste away. Now an angel of the Lord, baking cakes, a cruse of water. He ate, and then he laid down again.

And so the angel of the Lord came to him a second time, and touched him, [He was probably pretty tired, you figure that it's probably a little over a hundred miles from Jezreel to Beersheba. Then he kept going, another days journey. He was really moving! No doubt, really tired. He ate, and went right back to sleep. So the angel came the second time. I don't think immediately, I think he let the poor prophet sleep for awhile. "He touched him",] and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for you. And so he arose, and did eat and drink, and he went in the strength of that meat for forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God (19:7-8).

Potent, powerful stuff! This angel's food. It was able to sustain him for forty days, and forty nights. Down to mount Horeb, the mount of God. The place where God gave unto Moses, the law. The area of the plains, and the, of, of Sinai there in the Sinai peninsula.

And he came to a cave, and he lodged there; and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and said unto him, What are you doing here, Elijah? [Here is a prophet of God, on the run. Fearing Jezebel, his fear takes him clear on down to the borders of Egypt, almost, Sinai peninsula, to mount Horeb, hiding in a cave. There was no way they're gonna find this guy. He's come through miles and miles of trackless desert. Through the Negev, and on into the Sinai. There in the cave, God said, "What are you doing here?". And Elijah answered the Lord,] I've been very jealous for Jehovah the God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, they've thrown down your altars, they have slain your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away (19:9-10).

I mean how bad can things be? God has only one prophet left, according to Elijah, and he's hiding in a cave on Horeb, and they're out to get him. Now, it is true that the people broke the covenant of God. That covenant incidentally was made down here on Horeb. It was there that God gave to Moses the two tables of stone, upon which were written, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make any graven images to bow down to them, and to worship them, for I the Lord God, am a jealous God". As God established the Mosaic covenant, God said, "If you will keep my commandments, and the statutes that I have given unto thee, then I will be your God, and you will be my people".

But Elijah is saying, "Lord, they have forsaken your covenant". Which they did. "They have slain your prophets." Which they did. They were searching for Elijah. All that he said was true indeed. But that wasn't the answer to the question. God didn't say, "Why are you here Elijah?", God said, "What are you doing here Elijah?"

And so the Lord said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, Jehovah passed by, and a great and strong wind rent [or tore] the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before Jehovah;

[Standing there, powerful, powerful wind. Breaking rocks to pieces, loosing them no doubt, from the ledges, and they're crashing down. This awesome display of the powers of nature in the wind! But, it said,] *Jehovah was not in the wind: and after the wind there was an earthquake; but Jehovah was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but Jehovah was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice (19:11-12).*

There are times when God has been in the shaking. There have been times when God was in the wind. Times when God was in the fire. In fact, the bible says, "Our God is a consuming fire". But there is phenomena of which God is not in it. There is shaking many times, when God isn't in it. There is fire at times, in which God is not in it. A false fire. I believe that most generally, when God speaks to us, He speaks to us with a still small voice.

I think that if a person is truly, spiritually sensitive, he will hear and be tuned in to hear the still small voice. If a person has a violent kind of a shaking, powerful, emotional experiences, it does not necessarily follow that, that person is a deep spiritual person, or is having deep spiritual experiences. It could be that he is so spiritually dull that, that's the only way God can get his attention. People are usually prone to think of those services, where there's just a lot of shouting, and shaking and all, as being powerfully spiritual. Not necessarily so. It could be that they are just so spiritually dull in their senses to the voice of God, and to the things of God, that, that's the only way God can communicate to them. Not a sign of deeper spiritual achievements.

How many times God has spoken to me with that still small voice, and I didn't listen. So He had to use the hammer. It wasn't a sign that I was more spiritual really, if I'd listened to the still small voice, I wouldn't have had to go through the fire! Oh that I would be obedient to the still small voice, so that God wouldn't have to put me in the refining fire, that I would listen. When the still small voice came...

Elijah heard it, and he wrapped his face in his mantle, and he went out, and stood at the entering of the cave. And, it came to pass, as he stood there, the Lord asked him again, Elijah what are you doing here (19:13)?

Again, Elijah evidently did not understand the question, and he answered in the same way, telling God why he was there.

And he said, I've been very jealous for Jehovah the God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, they've thrown down your altars, they've slain your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And Jehovah said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when you come, anoint Hazael to be the king over Syria (19:14-15):

Now what the Lord is, in essence, saying to Jeremiah, "Jeremiah, you're doing nothing man! and there's a job to be done. Now get back to work". That's often the greatest therapy, for a person who is discouraged, and feels defeated. God says, "Get back to work". He wants to quit, he wants to die. He wants the Lord to kill him. God says, "Get back to work Elijah. There's a job to be done. Now get on up to Damascus". The interesting thing, when he ran, he ran the opposite direction from which God had his work. When you get scared and run, you're often running in the opposite direction from which God wants you to go. So he had to retrace his steps. Go all the way back, go north from Jezreel, to Damascus, and there Hazael was anointed as the king over Syria.

And then, you're to anoint Jehu to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat you shall anoint to be the prophet in your place. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapes the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapes the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. [And then God adds a little footnote.] And I have left for me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed it (19:16-18).

"You say you're alone? You're not. I've got seven thousand still in Israel, who haven't bowed to Baal." God's faithful remnant. You will find that this is always through, through the history of mankind. God has always reserved a faithful remnant. Those that would be faithful to God in the midst of apostasy. God always has His faithful remnant.

We are living in the midst of apostasy here in the United States, and I pray God, that we will be the faithful remnant. That we will not bow our knees to Baal. Or to Ashtoreth, or to Molech, or to Mammon. To

the gods that are worshiped here in the United States. The gods of power, prosperity, the gods of pleasure, the gods of the human intellect. When God counts those who have not bowed their knee to Baal, to Ashtoreth, may God be able to count us as His faithful remnant. That course I have decided to follow Jesus. That one verse, "Though none go with me, still I will follow". May we make that kind of a commitment to the Lord. Lord I will be faithful, I will serve you. I will not bow my knee to the gods of this age, the gods of this world. I will be faithful unto you. God had His faithful remnant.

So he departed from there, and he found Elisha the son of Shaphat, [And this is our introduction, we're gonna find out an awful lot about Elisha, as we move into II Kings. He, he is an exciting fellow. I personally sort of, uh, well, I like him sort of, more, more than I do Elijah. He was a guy that really wanted all that God had. When Elijah said, "What do you want?", you know, he said, "Give me a double portion of the spirit that is on you". I mean hey, he's a guy that goes for it. I like people that go for it! You know, All that God has! I want everything that God has for me! "And he found Elisha,"] he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen that were before him, [I mean this is, you know this guy doesn't do things in a small way. Twelve yoke of oxen!] and he was with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and took his mantle and threw it on him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and mother, and then I will follow you. [A guy who was ready to make an immediate commitment. "All I want to do is go home and kiss my parents man, and I'm with you! I'll follow you!"] And Elijah said, What have I done to you? Go home: And he returned back from him, and he took a yoke of oxen, and he slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and he gave unto the people, and he did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and became his servant (19:19-21).

So Elisha became the servant of Elijah.

Chapter 20

At this time Benhadad the king of Syria gathered all of his hosts together: and there were thirty two kings with him, horses, chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it (20:1).

Now these thirty two were vassal kings, they weren't kings of major nations. But, they had in those days sort of city states, and each city had its king. So Benhadad king over Syria, had thirty two of these vassal kings, that joined with him. They probably were paying tribute to him, and when he went out to war, they would come and support with their troops.

He sent messengers unto king Ahab king of Israel, and said unto him, Thus saith Benhadad, Your silver and your gold is mine; your wives and your children, even the goodliest, are mine. [The goodliest is a word in Hebrew that means, handsomest. So, "Your children are mine, all your handsome sons, they're all mine".] And the king of Israel answered and said, My Lord, O king, according to your saying, I am yours, and all that I have (20:2-4).

He realized that he was outnumbered by the Syrians, and he was willing to give this tribute to the king of Syria. The gold, the silver, his wives and children. Now, he's not a very, well I don't know, if I had Jezebel as a wife, I might say, "Alright man! You've got a deal!"

And so the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Benhadad, saying, Although I have sent unto you, saying, You shall deliver me your silver, and your gold, and your wives, and your children; Yet I'm going to send my servants unto you tomorrow about this time, and they're gonna search through your house, and the houses of your servants; and it shall be, that what ever it is [that is valuable that you have. What ever is,] pleasant in your eyes, they're going to put in their hand, and take it away (20:5-6).

Now, he asked for the silver and gold, wives and children, and Ahab is willing to do this. But he only comes back with a stronger demand. "Nope, don't send them to me, I'll send my servants, and they'll pick up anything else that they see, that they want, that they desire".

And so the king of Israel called all of the elders of the land, and he said, Mark, I pray you, and look how this man is seeking mischief: for he sent to me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold; and I did not deny him. And all of the elders and all of the people said unto him, Do not hearken to him, nor consent. Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Benhadad, Tell my Lord the king, That all that you did send for at the first I will do: but I won't do this last which you've required. So the messengers

departed, and brought word to Benhadad. And Benhadad sent to him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria will suffice for the handfuls for all of the people that follow me (20:7-10).

Now this is a typical boast of oriental kings. It was something that was quite common in those days, the, the, they would try to uh, sort of cower their enemies with threats. "I've got so many men, you know that if they each took a handful of dust out of Samaria, there wouldn't be enough dust for them. I mean we, we're just gonna come and trample you to dust, but we're, we've got so many...". One of the Midianite kings in sending a threat said, "Our arrows will be so many, it will blacken the sky. It will be like night. That's how many arrows we're gonna shoot at you, if you don't capitulate." You know, "Make the sky dark!" And so they had the way of threatening.

Of course it's quite obvious that Benhadad just is looking for a fight. I mean, he made a rather unreasonable demand, and Ahab was willing to go along with it, and so he, he just comes back with a greater demand, because he really wants to fight. It's sort of you know, "Knock that chip off my shoulder!", you know, and uh, it's just looking for the fight.

And so the king of Israel answered and said, [In a proverb.] Let not him that girds on his harness boast himself as him that puts it off (20:11).

In other words, as you're putting on your sword, and your shield and all, you may boast of what you're gonna do, but better to wait until the battle is over, and do your boasting. You know, when you see what the outcome is. Because, it may be a different story when the battle is over. So, you know, it's like saying, "Man we're gonna pound you to a pulp", you know, and all. And you know, you sort of think of the rivalry of football teams, and, What we're gonna do to them, when we get them on the field". Then you go out and take a real shellacking, heads are down, you know, and when you leave the field, you've really been beat! And all of this bravado and talk beforehand, and then it's a whole different thing, when you've faced them on the field. So, "Let not him who puts on his harness, boast as one who takes it off".

And it came to pass, when Benhadad heard that message, as he was drinking, he and the kings there in the little booth that they had made, he said unto his servants, Set yourselves in battle array. And they set themselves in array against the city. [I mean, he was really, "Alright!", you know, "That's it!"] And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab the king of Israel, [Now, you remember when Elijah, after being hid for three and a half years, appeared, first of all to this guy, Obadiah, who was a friend of Ahab's. In fact, he was a servant of Ahab, chief servant of his house. They were looking for grass for their animals, that they would not perish. Elijah appeared to Obadiah. You remember the story? And he said, "Go tell Ahab that I'll meet him here", and Obadiah says, "Hey, come on man. I'm a good man, don't you know? Haven't you heard about me? I fear God, and when the king put to death the prophets, I hid a hundred of them in caves, fifty in each cave, and I fed them with bread and water. Why would you do this to me man? Because if I say that you're here, and the king comes, and the Spirit of God has caught you away someplace, then he's gonna kill me. Why would you want to kill me man? I, I'm a God fearing man." This prophet, is perhaps one of those that Obadiah had protected and shielded from the king, when he was killing the prophets of God. This prophet came to the king. Interesting, that God didn't use Elijah at this time, but this prophet came to the king,] and he said, Have you seen this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into your hand this day; and you shall know that I am Jehovah (20:12-13).

Now God sent fire, that he might know that He was Jehovah. Now God is promising another sign. "I'm gonna deliver this great multitude of the Syrians, and these confederate kings into your hands. And you will know that I am Jehovah."

And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith Jehovah, Even by the young men the princes of the provinces. And he said, And who shall lead them into battle? And he answered, You (20:14).

Now, to me another classic example of the grace of God. That God would still deal with Ahab, who was totally wicked. I mean, you talk about redeeming features, there is not one redeeming feature in this man! He is corrupt. He has led the nation down the tubes in corruption, and still, God in His grace, deals with him. I marvel at the patience of God. I marvel at the longsuffering of God. Here's a man who turned his back on God, over and over again. Here is a man that had set himself against God, and yet God is so patient in dealing with him, and gives him chance, after chance, after chance. Oh, the grace, the longsuffering, the

mercy, the compassion of God. How we abuse that so many times. Ahab, God's still speaking to him. If I were God I wouldn't speak to that guy anymore. I'd just say, "Let the Syrians go for it".

Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and there were two hundred and thirty two: [Not very many against the vast army of Syria.] and after them he numbered all the people, even all the children of Israel, seven thousand. [(That he counted then). I mean you've got a case almost like Gideon against the Midianites. Just a few men against this vast host of Syrians.] And they went out at noon. But Benhadad was drinking himself drunk in these pavilions, [Which were little thatched, uh the word is booths in the Hebrew. They would make these little pavilions, instead of the tents for the kings.] And he and the kings, the thirty two kings that were helping him. And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Benhadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men that have come out from Samaria (20:15-17).

So, word comes back to Benhadad, whose pretty drunk at this time, you know, "Some men have come out from the city".

And he said, If they have come out for peace, take them alive; if they've come out for war, take them alive. [They are to capture them alive, even if they are emissaries of peace.] So the young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed. And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians [panicked, they] fled; and Israel pursued them: and Benhadad the king of Syria escaped on a horse with his horsemen. And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses the chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter. And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen yourself, and mark, and see what you do: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against you again (20:18-22).

So, "Prepare yourself, get ready, because he's coming back in a year".

And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are the gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let's fight against them in the plain, and surely we will be stronger than they. And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their rooms: ["These drunk kings, they're no good. You know let's get the military. Politicians can't fight wars." We've learned that too haven't we? Ha, ha! "Let there be the professionals, the captains, let them be over the hosts."] And number an army like you had. Man for man, the one you lost, horse for horse, chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And [they] he hearkened unto their voice, and did so (20:23-25).

Now they had their concepts of God, were very provincial, and they had gods that they could localize. Um, "Their gods are evidently the gods of the hills, and that's why when we fought them in the hills, they were able to beat us. But they're not the god of the plains, so let's get them out in the, in the plains, and then we can wipe them out". Thinking that their god was limited to the hills. The gods of the hills. Thinking of God in locality.

Now we don't like to do this, but sometimes, even in our phrases, we sort of give off the concept of a God of locality. So that as we gather in church, and we pray, we so often say, "Oh God it is so good to gather tonight in your presence". As though God is a God of locality and He dwells in this building, but He doesn't dwell in your car, or He doesn't dwell in your home. "So we've gathered tonight in the presence of the Lord." Well, yes we have in a sense, but we were in the presence of the Lord when we left our houses. We were in the presence of the Lord as we were driving here, as we were walking in, when we were yelling at the kids. You don't escape His presence. "Whither shall I flee from thy presence?"

David said. "If I ascend into heaven, thou art there. If I descend into hell, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and flee to the uttermost parts of the sea, even there you surround me." Paul the apostle, in talking to the Greeks, who had local gods, and had gods for every emotion, every feeling. Gods of love, gods of hate, gods of war, gods of peace, gods of anger, gods of joy. As he talked to these Athenians, he said, "I perceive that you people are very religious. Because as I've been walking through your streets here, I've seen all of these altars that you have built unto your gods". And he said, "I passed by one altar, and I saw the inscription, 'To the Unknown God'. I'd like to tell you about this God. He's the one that created the heavens and the earth, and in Him, we live, and move, and have our being". We're surrounded.

We don't escape it. He's everywhere. So, they had this idea, "He's the god of the hills, let's meet them in the plains. We'll go out with the same size army, and boy this time, we'll just meet them in the plains. We'll really take care of them there".

It came to pass at the return of the year, that Benhadad numbered the Syrians, and he went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel. [Now there are several Aphek's in the bible, and just where this one is, is a matter of conjecture.] And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present, and went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of goats; but the Syrians filled the country (20:26-27).

I mean it's sort of a pitiful thing here, the battle's set up, and the Syrians come with these massive troops, and chariots, and everything else, and they just fill the country. And here are these two little units of Israel. They look like just a little flock of sheep here on the hillside, against this huge host of the Syrians.

And there came a man of God, and he spoke unto the king of Israel, and he said, Thus saith Jehovah, Because the Syrians have said, That Jehovah is the God of the hills, but he's not the God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all of this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am Jehovah (20:28-29).

Again! God proving Himself to the king. Now I like this, "He's the God not only of the hills, but of the valleys. He's not only the God of the mountaintop experiences, but He's got also the valleys. And He is with us in the valley, as well as on the mountaintop. So many times when we go through some of these valley experiences, we feel sort of destitute like God has forsake us. And, we are prone to say, "Well He's the God of the hills. I had the most glorious experience, oh the mountaintop experience. Up at the conference center with the men. Oh it was so glorious! Oh in the presence of God, marvelous!", you know. Back down here in the smog, the problems. You know, back in the valley. "What a shame, wish God were here, wish I could feel His presence here." But, no. He's the God of the valleys. "And yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." The God of the valleys. You know, many times I find that God becomes more real to me in the valley, than on the mountaintops. Now, because they have said, "He's the God of the hills, not the God of the valleys". "Tell you what. This time we're gonna meet them in the valleys, and really wipe them out!"

So they pitched one against the other for seven days. [They just stood there, a face off, looking at each other for seven days.] And it was so, after the seventh day that they began to battle: and the children of Israel slew the Syrians a hundred thousand infantry men in one day. But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and there a wall fell on twenty seven thousand of the men that were left. And Benhadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber. And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: [Now that was something unusual. Usually kings weren't very merciful. The Assyrians were noted for their cruelty, for the way that they would brutalize the captives, mutilating their bodies, torturing them. Pulling out their tongues, cutting off their noses, or ears, and mutilating their captives. They were so horrible, so unmerciful, that many times entire cities would commit suicide, rather than be captured by the Assyrians. They were noted for their cruelty. "But we've heard that the kings of Israel are merciful." Yes they were, because they knew God, and had received mercy from God. And so he said,] let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth over our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and let's go out to the king of Israel: ["And perhaps he'll save your life. Let's just submit to him."] And so they girded sackcloth on their loins, and they put ropes on their heads, they came to the king of Israel, and they said, Your servant Benhadad says, I pray thee, let me live. And Ahab answered, Is he still alive? he is my brother. So the men did diligently observe [You know, how he was going to respond.] and they hastily caught it: and they said, Ah ha, your brother Benhadad. Then he said, Go bring him. And Benhadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into his chariot. And Benhadad said unto him, The cities, which my father took from your father, I will restore; [And you shall make,] and I will make streets for you in Damascus, ["They'll name streets after you in Damascus."] as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away (20:29-34).

So here he had the enemy, at his mercy, and he showed mercy.

But a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his neighbor in the word of the Lord, Smite me, I

pray thee. And the man refused to smite him. Then he said unto him, Because you have not obeyed the voice of Jehovah, behold, as soon as you've departed from me, a lion is going to slay you. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him. Then he found another man, and he said, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man smote him, so in smiting him, he wounded him. And the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, and he disguised himself with ashes [Or bandages] upon his face [From the wounds.] And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Your servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: and if by any means he is missing, then it will be your life for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver. And as your servant was busy here and there, he escaped. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall your judgement be; you yourself, have decided it. So he hurried, and he took the bandages away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he was one of the prophets. And he said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people. And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and he came to Samaria (20:35-43).

Sort of a, well, it's a rough way to end a victorious day. God had given him great victory. He had Benhadad in his hands. Benhadad pleaded for mercy, and he said, "Oh my brother Benhadad", you know, and, so they said, "Yeah he's still alive". And they said, "Bring him to me", and he came up in his chariot, and Benhadad said, "Let's make a covenant together, you know if you release me, then I'll return to you the cities that my father took from your father, and I will set up streets for you in Damascus, as my father set up streets in Samaria". And so he released him, he let him go. But God was displeased. Why? Because God had appointed this man, Benhadad for utter destruction. Now, let it be noted, that he was utterly destroyed, however God used someone else to do it.

You may fail, you may fail God, you may fail to fulfill the purposes of God. If you fail, God will raise someone else to do it. But you will be at a loss, because of your failure. When the king of Persia, Ahasuerus, made a decree through the guise of the men, that on a certain day, every Jew in all of the province of the Neo-Persian empire, were to be put to death. Mordecai, went into Ester and he said, "You better go in and plead with the king to change this decree". She sent a message out, and said, "You don't understand the protocol of the king's court. You just don't go in and see him, even though he's my husband. I just don't go in and see him whenever I want. I don't go in unless he calls me. If I should go in without being called, if he doesn't want to see me, if he doesn't raise his scepter, then the guards will immediately put me to death". Mordecai sent a message back, and he said, "Do you think that if this decree goes through that you're going to escape? Even though you're in the palace, it will affect you. If you at this point, should fail, God is going to deliver His people, He'll raise up someone else. But you, will be at a loss".

God uses human instruments to do His work. There's a weakness there, because the human instruments are not always faithful to God, because we are self determinant. We have the power of choice. I can choose not to do the will of God. I can choose to do my own thing, to go my own way. I can fail to fulfill the purposes of God by my exercise of choice or will. Now that doesn't mean that the purposes of God are going to totally fail. As Mordecai said, "Their deliverance will arise from another quarter. But you yourself will be lost". You will be the loser. God will do His work,

I have the opportunity of being the instrument, if I so yield my life to God, and if I do, then God blesses and rewards me. But if I fail, then I'm the loser. Ahab was the instrument to bring God's judgement against Benhadad. God had appointed that Ahab should bring His judgement, for God had appointed Benhadad to utter destruction. Ahab failed. He chose to release him.

So this prophet of God, and Josephus tells us that it was Micaiah, who next week you'll understand a little better. Because next week we're gonna be introduced to Micaiah. After all of these prophets had encouraged Ahab to go to battle, Jehoshaphat said, "Is there any that we can enquire of Jehovah?", and Ahab said, "Ah there's one guy Micaiah, but man, that guy always says bad stuff to me. He never says anything good. He said, "Well, don't say that, just call him in here". So Josephus says that was Micaiah who came to him with his bandaged face. He'd been wounded. He had told this guy, "Hit me! In the name of Jehovah, hit me!", and the guy said, "Oh no, I don't want to hit you man!". He said, "Because you have not obeyed the

Lord, as soon as you leave me, a lion's gonna devour you man". Said to the next guy, "Hit me!". And the guy hit him, wounded him. So he put this bandage on, and he came to the king in this disguise. He made up this story. "A prisoner was given to me, and I was to watch him. The guy says, 'Watch him and if the guy escapes, it'll be your life for his.', and while I was busy doing other things, the guy escaped". And the king said, "Hey you've named your own sentence man, you've judged yourself. You let him escape. You've named your own penalty". And then he pulls down the bandage, shows his face. And the king said, "Oh no! Not him!". And he said, "Thus saith the Lord, you let him go. It's gonna be your life for his. You let go of the man that God had appointed for utter destruction. Therefore it's gonna be your life for his". And, it was, as we will see when we move on a little further. So, rather than going home to enjoy the victory. He went home defeated, miserable. The pronouncement of God's judgement was upon him, and he was not able then to enjoy the fruit of the victory, because of his failure, in obeying God.

So many times, so many times, our lives are made miserable because of our disobedience to God. When there are experiences that we should be rejoicing and have great victory over, and what should be cause of great rejoicing, we're miserable, because we did not obey God fully. Those times of rejoicing and victory are often turned into that of sadness and sorrow, because of our failure of obedience. Such was the case with Ahab.

We'll finish I Kings next week. So your assignment for next week is the last two chapters, and we'll finish this book.

As our hearts are quiet before the Lord, and we listen for the still small voice, I'm sure that to many He is saying, "What are you doing here?". What are you doing for God? Doing a lot for yourself. What are you doing for God? And many people are totally inactive in their service or work for God. They pay to God a lip service, but that's about all. What are you doing? Not what are you saying, what are you doing for God? May God cause each of us to examine our own hearts, and allow the Spirit of God to examine our hearts. And, may we be open to be led by God into the area of service, where God would send us. This week, I'm certain that God has something for you to do. If you'll listen to His voice, and be obedient unto Him, He will lead you into that work that He wants you to accomplish for the kingdom. James said, "Be ye doers of the word, not hearers only". What are you doing here? God help us. We'll be doing for Him.