

You Will Know that I am the LORD

1 Kings 20-22

Key Verse: 20:13

“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.”’”

Today's passage contains many exciting events. Underlying them all is the Lord's teaching to his people, "You will know that I am the Lord." He really wanted his people to know that he is the Lord. He is the Lord of mercy and he is also the Lord who judges. It is essential to know the Lord. Many young people want to know Derek Rose, or Kate Hudson, or President Obama. To know such people may be good, but it is not essential to us. To know the Lord is absolutely essential--a matter of life and death. When we accept the Lord as God, he blesses our lives, families, community, and nation. Let's welcome the Lord as our God and submit to his reign.

I. The Lord reveals his mercy (20:1-34)

Look at 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." Who was Ben-Hadad? He was the king of Aram, a powerful nation northeast of Israel. He was a strong ruler who mustered 32 kings and a vast army. With them, he was confident of victory over Israel. So he sent messengers to Ahab, king of Israel, saying, "Your silver and gold are mine, and the best of your wives and children are mine." This was a great insult to Ahab; it should have roused his ire. But in fear he surrendered, saying, "Just as you say, my lord the king. I and all I have are yours" (3). Then Ben-Hadad became more greedy and confident and sent a second message, "I sent to demand your silver and gold, your wives and your children. 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" (5-6). Then Ahab consulted the elders. They told him, "Don't listen to him or agree to his demands." They may not have minded losing Ahab's wives and children, especially Jezebel, but they were not willing to give up their own. They would rather fight. Ahab must have gained some fighting spirit from them. So he refused Ben-Hadad's second demand. Then Ben-Hadad cursed Ahab, saying, "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" (10). Ahab, now growing in spirit, responded, "One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off" (11). It was similar to the saying, "Don't count

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your chickens before they hatch." In fact, Ben-Hadad was overconfident. He trusted in his superior numbers and weapons. Yet his spirit was like that of a spectator at a ball game. He and his allies drank a lot, getting drunk as early as noon (16). There is a saying that overconfidence precedes failure; this was Ben-Hadad's weak point. He could learn from lions, which do their best, even in catching rabbits. When Ben-Hadad heard Ahab's message, he barked out pompously, "Prepare to attack." It seemed that the Israelites were on the verge of destruction.

What happened? At this critical moment the Lord intervened. Look at 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."'" The Lord knew that Ahab was fearful of the vast Aramean army. The Lord wanted Ahab to turn his eyes upon the Lord God of Israel, Almighty God, the Sovereign Ruler of history. The Lord promised to give the Aramean army into Ahab's hand. The Lord wanted Ahab to know that the God of Israel is the Lord who ruled the world, including Aram. The Lord hoped that Ahab would recognize him as God, turn to him, and follow him. Although Ahab had done evil in the eyes of the Lord, the Lord did not punish him. Rather, the Lord poured out his mercy on Ahab. Why? It was to restore a relationship with Ahab and his people. Though Israel had rebelled against him, the Lord loved them and wanted to save them. The Lord did not want them to perish, but, instead, to turn to the Lord. So at their time of crisis, the Lord decided to intervene. The Lord is God who pours out his blessing on undeserving sinners.

This was good news to Ahab. He asked humbly, "Who will do this?" The prophet replied, "This is what the Lord says: 'The young officers of the provincial commanders will do it.'" These young men were pure and energetic. They were willing to fight. However, their number was only 232, and the rest of the Israelite army numbered only 7,000. On the other hand, Ben-Hadad had a vast army of more than 127,000 men (29,30), plus horses and chariots. It was a great mismatch; the odds were 18 to 1 for the Arameans. But the battle belongs to the Lord. When Ahab obeyed the Lord's direction, Israel won a great victory. Led by the young officers, the king of Israel advanced, overpowered the enemy, and inflicted heavy losses (19-21).

The Lord continued to bless Israel by warning King Ahab through a prophet, saying, "Strengthen your position and see what must be done, because next spring the king of Aram will attack you again" (22). The Lord wanted to give Ahab complete victory over his enemy so that he might realize that the Lord is God. The

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Arameans knew that some divine power had aided Israel in the first battle. But they did not know the Lord. They thought that God was just the god of the hills. They thought that if they fought on the plains they would defeat the Israelites. They appointed legitimate army commanders to replace the defeated kings. They decided to raise an army like the one which was lost--horse for horse and chariot for chariot (23-25). When the spring came, Ben-Hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. The Israelites also mustered their army and camped opposite the Arameans. The Israelites were like two small flocks of goats, while the Arameans covered the countryside (27).

However, another miracle was on the way. Look at 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."'" Here we find repeated the phrase, "...and you will know that I am the Lord." The Lord was not happy that the Arameans robbed his glory in victory by localizing him to the hills like one of their idols. The Lord wanted to make it clear to both Israel and Aram that the Lord God of Israel is God of all the earth. So he promised to deliver the Arameans into Israel's hands a second time, even though they fought in the valley. The Lord wanted to restore Israel's knowledge of the one true God, which had been lost due to Baal worship. The Lord wanted them to obey him, live under his blessing and be a blessing to all nations. We must know that Lord is the only true God. It is because he is the Creator God and the only Savior for mankind. Isaiah 42:8 says, "I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols." And Isaiah 45:22 says, "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other."

Knowing the Lord is more than intellectual assent; it is surrender to his reign. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." Though a man plans and prepares thoroughly, his plan will not succeed if it is against the Lord's purpose. This principle applies to every aspect of life: family life, job, school study, and ministry. It also applies nationally. If our purpose is not in line with the Lord's purpose, we will not prevail, even though we work hard. However, if we accept the Lord's purpose, we will succeed no matter the obstacles. So it is essential to acknowledge the Lord and pray for his help in whatever we do.

So what happened? The Israelites went out and fought and inflicted 100,000 casualties on the Arameans in one day. The rest of the Arameans escaped to the city of Aphek, where the wall collapsed on 27,000 of them. And Ben-Hadad fled to

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the city and hid in an inner room. He seemed to be doomed. But his officials thought that Ahab might forgive him if he humbled himself by wearing sackcloth around his waist and rope around his head. When they approached in that way, Ahab's pride surged. He welcomed Ben-Hadad into his chariot, made a treaty with him, and let him go. This was a big mistake. Ben-Hadad was God's prisoner. The Lord had determined that he should die (42). By releasing him, Ahab worked against God's purpose. God had given Ahab great victory by his grace. Ahab should have realized that the Lord is God. He should have thanked God, glorified God, and obeyed God's commands wholeheartedly. Instead, Ahab became proud and ungodly. So for him, the Lord of mercy would become the Lord of judgment.

II. The Lord reveals his judgment (20:35-22:53)

First, the Lord sentences Ahab; Ahab is sullen and angry (20:35-43). Look at 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." It must have seemed hard for the man to strike his fellow prophet. But in fact, he revealed a humanistic tendency. When the Lord gives his word, prophets must obey as a matter of life or death. The prophet told his reluctant companion, "Because you have not obeyed the Lord, as soon as you leave me a lion will kill you." And that is just what happened (36). The lion did not like the disobedient prophet and was willing to kill him. This teaches that since disobedient prophets do not escape God's judgment, disobedient kings will not either. Furthermore, we learn that God's messenger must deliver God's message--not only words of blessing, but also words of judgment.

The prophet knew he had to obey God's word absolutely. So he found another man and said, "Strike me, please" (37a). This time he asked politely, and did not demand the use of a weapon. So the man struck him by faith and wounded him (37b). Now the prophet was ready to deliver God's message of judgment to the king. He went and stood by the road, disguised as a wounded soldier, with his headband pulled over his eyes (38). Then as the king passed by, he called out, asking the king's judgment for letting a prisoner escape. The king pronounced the death sentence. Then the prophet quickly removed the headband from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. The prophet delivered the message of judgment 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'" (41-42). When Ahab heard this, he should have repented, hunted down Ben-Hadad, and killed him. Ben-Hadad had insulted the Lord, Israel, and Ahab. He was the Lord's enemy. The Lord wanted to put him to death as judgment

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for his sin. But in the time of God's great victory, Ahab became conceited and handled the victory as his own. He made a treaty with the Lord's enemy and set him free. Here we learn that in the time of the Lord's victory we must honor the Lord as God. We should not become proud, but humble ourselves, and discern God's purpose. We must render glory to God. And when God's word rebukes us, we should be humble and repentant. However, Ahab was sullen and angry, and went to his palace in Samaria.

Second, God's judgment tempered by mercy (21:1-28). By becoming sullen and angry, Ahab did not get better; instead, he got worse, as this chapter reveals. Ahab wanted a vineyard next to his palace to use as a vegetable garden. This vineyard belonged to Naboth. Ahab offered to compensate Naboth well. But Naboth refused, saying, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." Naboth stood on the word of the Lord which governed the transfer of property in Israel (Num 36:7; Eze 46:18). Based on the word of God, he refused even the king's command. Naboth must have known the danger of refusing the king. But he decided to obey God at the risk of his life. When he feared the Lord, he did not fear the king. Finally, he was indeed murdered. His death was that of a righteous man. Surely, he was one of the 7,000 in Israel who did not bow the knee to Baal.

Naboth's refusal revealed the Lord's sovereign rule over Israel through his word. It hurt Ahab's pride as a king. This, plus the fact that Ahab could not have his vegetable garden, made him fall into depression. So he lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat. When Jezebel heard about this, she devised an evil plan to kill Naboth and take his vineyard. She used two scoundrels to make false charges of blasphemy and stone Naboth to death. Ahab complied with her shamelessly. Perhaps he even said, "Thank you," to his wife and began to do a celebration dance. Was that the end? No. The Lord was going to judge both Ahab and Jezebel (17-24). For this task, the Lord summoned the prophet Elijah and told him to proclaim the guilty verdict against Ahab: "This is what the Lord says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?" The Lord also told Elijah to pronounce sentence: "This is what the Lord says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood--yes, yours!"

When Elijah approached, Ahab said, "So you have found me, my enemy!" Ahab spoke as though there was no God, and Elijah had a personal grudge against him. Elijah answered, "I have found you because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord." Ahab had abused the grace of God given to him, and he had hardened his heart to God's word repeatedly. Every time he resisted the Lordship

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of God, his heart became harder. Now he was "sold to do evil in the eyes of the Lord," a slave of sin and Satan. Ahab's sin was not only against Naboth, it was against the Lord. The wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23). Elijah pronounced God's judgment against Ahab: "I am going to bring disaster on you. I will consume your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel--slave or free. I will make your house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat and that of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have provoked me to anger and have caused Israel to sin" (21-22). Then Elijah turned his attention to Jezebel. "And also concerning Jezebel the Lord says: 'Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel'" (21-24). The author commented: "There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel" (25-26).

When Ahab heard the words of judgment, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly (27). It is amazing that he repented. The Lord noticed Ahab's repentant attitude and tempered his judgment with mercy. The Lord decided not to bring the disaster in Ahab's day, but in the days of his son (28). Here we learn that God is merciful to those who repent, even if they are very evil. God wants us to realize our sins and repent sincerely. Then we can receive God's mercy. Ezekiel 33:11 says, "Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'" This is God's heart. Ahab's repentance, and God's display of mercy, teach us not to be fatalistic about God's prophetic judgments. God is always willing to show mercy to those who repent.

Third, God's judgment was fulfilled (22:1-53). Although Ahab repented at the critical time, he did not change the fundamental direction of his life. In order to be saved from the Lord's judgment, we must bear the fruit of repentance and live for God's purpose. When Ahab did not really change, he finally died in a war with the king of Aram in a bid to reclaim Ramoth Gilead. It is ironic that Ahab's death was ordered by Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, whom Ahab had released against the Lord's will. Thus, Ahab's death fulfilled the prophetic judgment spoken against him, "It is your life for his life" (20:42).

In the war against Aram, Ahab collaborated with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. Before going into battle, they consulted the prophets in order to know the will of God. There were four hundred false prophets and just one true prophet, Micaiah. All four hundred false prophets gave optimistic predictions in order to please Ahab. They had no truth in their hearts. Only Micaiah spoke the words of truth

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without compromise. As a result, Micaiah was hated by King Ahab and despised and mistreated by the false prophets. Finally he was put in prison. Nevertheless, his prophecy came true. Ahab died in battle when a random arrow hit him between the sections of his armor (30-36). Although Ahab disguised himself, the arrow found him and killed him. It was the arrow of God's judgment. No one can escape the arrow of God's judgment. As Ahab's chariot was washed at a pool in Samaria, dogs licked up his blood, as the word of the Lord had declared (38). God's word of truth was fulfilled thoroughly and in detail.

Verses 41-50 tell about the reign of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. Verse 43 says, "In everything he walked in the ways of his father Asa and did not stray from them; he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord." Verses 51-53 tell us about Ahaziah, son of Ahab, who became king of Israel after Ahab. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He served the Baals and provoked the Lord, the God of Israel to anger, just as his father had done (51-53).

In conclusion, let's think about the words, "You will know that I am the Lord." This phrase is stated twice in this passage (20:13,28), and repeated often in the Bible (Exodus, Ezekiel, Isaiah, etc.). What does it mean? It means that the Lord God of Israel is the Creator God and the Sovereign Ruler of the world. The Lord is the only Savior, and he is the Judge of all mankind. To those who humble themselves and obey him, he shows mercy. But on those who are proud and disobedient, he carries out judgment. The big problem in our world is that people do not know the Lord. That is why they do evil. Even Christians doubt God's love, complain, and abandon the Lord if they do not get what they want. Or in times of success they become proud and forget the Lord. If we know the Lord, we fear him and have awesome respect for him. We come to the Lord as we are, depending on his mercy. God pours out his blessing on us one-sidedly. He gives us good grades, promotions in our jobs, the best husband or wife and children, and fruitful ministries. Why? It is so that we may recognize him as the Lord, thank him, honor him, obey him, follow his direction, and serve him wholeheartedly. If we misuse God's blessing, and do not thank and honor God, the Lord will judge us. Let's pray to honor the Lord in our personal lives, families, community, and our nation.