

**Ben-Hadad of Syria Attacks Ahab (c. 857n BC)**

1 Kings 20:1–22

**Ben-Hadad Besieges Israel's Capital Samaria**

1 Now Ben-hadad king of Aram gathered all his army, and there *were* thirty-two kings with him, and horses and chariots. And he went up and besieged Samaria and fought against it.

**Negotiations Fail**

2 Then he sent messengers to the city to Ahab king of Israel and said to him, "Thus says Ben-hadad,

3 'Your silver and your gold are mine; your most beautiful wives and children are also mine.'"

4 The king of Israel replied, "It is according to your word, my lord, O king; I am yours, and all that I have."

5 Then the messengers returned and said, "Thus says Ben-hadad, 'Surely, I sent to you saying, "You shall give me your silver and your gold and your wives and your children,"

6 but about this time tomorrow I will send my servants to you, and they will search your house and the houses of your servants; and whatever is desirable in your eyes, they will take in their hand and carry away.'"

7 Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land and said, "Please observe and see how this man is looking for trouble; for he sent to me for my wives and my children and my silver and my gold, and I did not refuse him."

8 All the elders and all the people said to him, "Do not listen or consent."

9 So he said to the messengers of Ben-hadad, "Tell my lord the king, 'All that you sent for to your servant at the first I will do, but this thing I cannot do.'" And the messengers departed and brought him word again.

10 Ben-hadad sent to him and said, "May the gods do so to me and more also, if the dust of Samaria will suffice for handfuls for all the people who follow me."

11 Then the king of Israel replied, "Tell *him*, 'Let not him who girds on *his armor* boast like him who takes *it off*.'"

12 When *Ben-hadad* heard this message, as he was drinking with the kings in the temporary shelters, he said to his servants, "Station *yourselves*." So they stationed *themselves* against the city.

**Yahweh Promises to Deliver Ahab**

13 Now behold, a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel and said, "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.'"

14 Ahab said, "By whom?" So he said, "Thus says the LORD, 'By the young men of the rulers of the provinces.'" Then he said, "Who shall begin the battle?" And he answered, "You."

**God Helps Ahab Defeat the Syrians**

15 Then he mustered the young men of the rulers of the provinces, and there were 232; and after them he mustered all the people, *even* all the sons of Israel, 7,000.

16 They went out at noon, while Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the temporary shelters with the thirty-two kings who helped him.

17 The young men of the rulers of the provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out and they told him, saying, "Men have come out from Samaria."

18 Then he said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; or if they have come out for war, take them alive."

19 So these went out from the city, the young men of the rulers of the provinces, and the army which followed them.

20 They killed each his man; and the Arameans fled and Israel pursued them, and Ben-hadad king of Aram escaped on a horse with horsemen.

21 The king of Israel went out and struck the horses and chariots, and killed the Arameans with a great slaughter.

### **Ben-Hadad's Second Attack Foretold**

22 Then the prophet came near to the king of Israel and said to him, "Go, strengthen yourself and observe and see what you have to do; for at the turn of the year the king of Aram will come up against you."

## **Ben-Hadad's Second Attack on the Northern Kingdom (c. 856n BC)**

1 Kings 20:23–43

### **Ben-Hadad Plans Another Attack**

23 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.

24 Do this thing: remove the kings, each from his place, and put captains in their place,

25 and muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot. Then we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we will be stronger than they." And he listened to their voice and did so.

### **Ahab is Vastly Outnumbered**

26 At the turn of the year, Ben-hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel.

27 The sons of Israel were mustered and were provisioned and went to meet them; and the sons of Israel camped before them like two little flocks of goats, but the Arameans filled the country.

### **God Gives Ahab the Victory**

28 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.'"

29 So they camped one over against the other seven days. And on the seventh day the battle was joined, and the sons of Israel killed *of* the Arameans 100,000 foot soldiers in one day.

30a But the rest fled to Aphek into the city, and the wall fell on 27,000 men who were left.

### **Ben-Hadad Pleads for His Life**

30b And Ben-hadad fled and came into the city into an inner chamber.

31 His servants said to him, "Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings, please let us put sackcloth on our loins and ropes on our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he will save your life."

32 So they girded sackcloth on their loins and *put* ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant Ben-hadad says, 'Please let me live.'"

### **Ahab Spares Ben-Hadad**

32b And he said, "Is he still alive? He is my brother."

33 Now the men took this as an omen, and quickly catching his word said, "Your brother Ben-hadad." Then he said, "Go, bring him." Then Ben-hadad came out to him, and he took him up into the chariot.

34 *Ben-hadad* said to him, "The cities which my father took from your father I will restore, and you shall make streets for yourself in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria." *Ahab* said, "And I will let you go with this covenant." So he made a covenant with him and let him go.

**God Sends a Prophet to Rebuke Ahab**

35 Now a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to another by the word of the LORD, “Please strike me.” But the man refused to strike him.

36 Then he said to him, “Because you have not listened to the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as you have departed from me, a lion will kill you.” And as soon as he had departed from him a lion found him and killed him.

37 Then he found another man and said, “Please strike me.” And the man struck him, wounding him.

38 So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes.

39 As the king passed by, he cried to the king and said, “Your servant went out into the midst of the battle; and behold, a man turned aside and brought a man to me and said, ‘Guard this man; if for any reason he is missing, then your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.’

40 While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone.” And the king of Israel said to him, “So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided *it*.”

41 Then he hastily took the bandage away from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him that he was of the prophets.

42 He said to him, “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.’”

43 So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and vexed, and came to Samaria.

**Naboth’s Vineyard (c. 856n BC)**

1 Kings 21:1–29

**Ahab Asks to Buy Naboth’s Vineyard**

1 Now it came about after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.

2 Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, “Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden because it is close beside my house, and I will give you a better vineyard than it in its place; if you like, I will give you the price of it in money.”

3 But Naboth said to Ahab, “The LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.” [cf. [Lev 25:23–28](#); [Num 36:7–9](#)]

4 So Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he said, “I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.” And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and ate no food.

**Jezebel’s Scheme**

5 But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, “How is it that your spirit is so sullen that you are not eating food?”

6 So he said to her, “Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, ‘Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you a vineyard in its place.’ But he said, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’”

7 Jezebel his wife said to him, “Do you now reign over Israel? Arise, eat bread, and let your heart be joyful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

8 So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name and sealed them with his seal, and sent letters to the elders and to the nobles who were living with Naboth in his city.

9 Now she wrote in the letters, saying, “Proclaim a fast and seat Naboth at the head of the people;

10 and seat two worthless men before him, and let them testify against him, saying, ‘You cursed God and the king.’ Then take him out and stone him to death.” [cf. [Deut 17:6–7](#); [19:15–21](#); [Exod 22:28](#); [Lev 24:13–16](#)]

**Naboth and His Sons are Murdered**

11 So the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent *word* to them, just as it was written in the letters which she had sent them.

12 They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the people.

13 Then the two worthless men came in and sat before him; and the worthless men testified against him, even against Naboth, before the people, saying, “Naboth cursed God and the king.” So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones.

14 Then they sent *word* to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been stoned and is dead.”

15 When Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, “Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead.”

16 When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

**Yahweh Sends Elijah to Foretell Ahab’s and Jezebel’s Punishment**

17 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,

18 “Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth where he has gone down to take possession of it.

19 “You shall speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Have you murdered and also taken possession?”’ And you shall speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, “In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth the dogs will lick up your blood, even yours.”’” [cf. [2 Kgs 9:24–26](#)]

20 Ahab said to Elijah, “Have you found me, O my enemy?” And he answered, “I have found *you*, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD.

21 “Behold, I will bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel;

22 and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked *Me* to anger, and *because* you have made Israel sin.

23 “Of Jezebel also has the LORD spoken, saying, ‘The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel.’

24 “The one belonging to Ahab, who dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and the one who dies in the field the birds of heaven will eat.”

25 Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife incited him.

26 He acted very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the sons of Israel.

**Ahab Humbles Himself and Yahweh Shows Mercy**

27 It came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently.

28 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,

29 “Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, *but* I will bring the evil upon his house in his son’s days.” [cf. [2 Kgs 22:8–20](#); [Jer 18:7–8](#)]

## Chronological Notes

- 1) During Ahab's reign, Shalmaneser III (the fourth of the neo-Assyrian kings) made it clear "that Assyria's objective was to extend her hegemony over the entire western world."<sup>1</sup> He conquered Carchemish in 857, one year before Ben-Hadad and Ahab made their treaty at Aphek (this may be the military and political context that helps make sense of Ahab's mercy to Ben-Hadad). "By 853 Shalmaneser pushed as far south as Qarqar (Khirbet Qerqur) on the Orontes River, not much more than a hundred miles from Damascus. There, according to his own annals, he engaged a great coalition of kings led by Ben-Hadad and including Ahab. In true Assyrian fashion he claims to have achieved a smashing victory, but the truth is surely something less than that. The very fact that he pressed no farther and, in fact, retreated to Calah, his capital, indicates that at best the affair was a stalemate. Moreover, Ben-Hadad and Ahab, following Qarqar, felt so free of Assyrian pressure that they broke their treaty and renewed hostilities."<sup>2</sup> Thus the battle at Qarqar is the recent military and political backdrop against which the story of Ahab, Jehoshaphat, Micaiah and the lying prophets takes place.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 348.

<sup>2</sup> Merrill, 348–349. From more data related to the dating of the Battle of Qarqar, see Kenneth A. **Strand**, "Thiele's Biblical Chronology as a Corrective for Extrabiblical Dates," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 34.2 (1996): 295–317; Rodger C. **Young**, "Evidence for Inerrancy from an Unexpected Source: OT Chronology," *Bible and Spade* 21.2 (2008): 54–64, and Bryant G. **Wood**, "Israelite Kings in Assyrian Inscriptions," *Bible and Spade* 24.2 (Spring 2011):