

# How to win a fight! - 1 Kings 20v1-43

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[0:00] It's a long chapter and we're going to cover it all, 43 verses, and it records a battle between King Ahab of Israel and Ben-Hadad, King of Aram or sometimes referred to as Syria.

And so what we're going to do is we're going to take it in three parts. So I'm going to read a section and then we're going to look at it together, then we'll read another section, look at it, and we'll do that three times.

And so we're going to read a bit at a time and look at it. So just a little bit different today. And again, if you've missed out on any of the talks, you can catch them all on the church website and have a look for them there.

Thanks very much, Louise. So let's pray and then we will look at God's word together. Father, would you help us to see this morning the battle that we are in?

God's word together. How you have won it for us so that we may walk in peace and not fear, that we may live trusting you, rejoicing in your victory and enjoying the blessings that flow to us.

[1:47] So Father, help us today. Work in our hearts, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the battle is about to start, so let's get straight into the action.

First, how not to win a battle? How not to win a battle? Let's read verses 1 to 12 of 1 Kings 20.

Now Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, mustered his entire army, accompanied by 32 kings, with all their horses and chariots.

And he went up and besieged Samaria and attacked it. He sent messengers into the city to Ahab, king of Israel, saying, This is what Ben-Hadad says.

Your silver and gold are mine, and the best of your wives and children are mine. The king of Israel answered, Well, just as you say, my lord the king, I and all I have are yours.

[2:57] The messengers came again and said, This is what Ben-Hadad says. 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. The king of Israel summoned all the elders of the land and said to them, See how this man is looking for trouble?

When he sent for my wives and my children and my silver and my gold, I didn't refuse him. The elders and all the people answered, Don't listen to him or agree to his demands.

So he replied to Ben-Hadad's messengers, Tell my lord the king. Your servant will do all you demand the first time. But this demand I cannot meet.

They left and took the answer back to Ben-Hadad. Then Ben-Hadad sent another messenger to Ahab, 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.

[4:10] The king of Israel answered, Tell him, one who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off.

Or as we might say, don't count your chickens before they hatch. Ben-Hadad heard this message while he and the kings were drinking in their tents. And he ordered his men, Prepare to attack.

So they prepared to attack the city. Well, Ahab is under attack. What should he do?

Well, despite Ahab's diplomacy, do you see it in verse 4? The king of Israel answered, Just as you say, my lord the king, I and all I have is yours.

I don't want to fight. Please take it. Well, Ben-Hadad seems intent on having a fight. Verse 6. About this time tomorrow, I am going to send my officials to search your palace and the houses of your officials, and they will seize everything you value and carry it away.

[ 5 : 23 ] What should Ahab do? Well, let's remember who's attacking who. Ahab is king of Israel. God's people.

Ben-Hadad, well, he was the enemy. Israel are God's people. And he has entered into a special relationship with them.

He loves them. He's made a covenant with them. Promised to be his God and they are to be his people. Loyal and faithful to them. And Ahab is the king of God's people.

Well, his role is to make sure they follow the Lord. That they obey him. And that they are equally committed to him. So what should Ahab do when he's being threatened?

Well, what he should do and what he does are two very different things. First, the tragedy of forgetting. Look at verse 7.

[ 6 : 32 ] So Ben-Hadad with his 32 other kings are about to attack. What does he do? Verse 7. The king of Israel summoned all the elders of the land and said to them, See how this man is looking for trouble.

What should I do? How am I going to win this battle? Now it seems wise, but it's actually very, very tragic.

Not too long ago Ahab had witnessed first hand the power of God on Mount Carmel. Through the prophet Elijah, God had sent fire on the sacrifice.

It was so powerful it burned up the sacrifice, the stones and the water. And the evidence was clear for everybody to see. God is the one and only true God.

The God of Israel. The all-powerful God who made all things and controls all things. He is God. But sadly, with the threat of war, Ahab runs to his elders, his advisors, his military men.

[ 7 : 41 ] It seems Ahab is stubbornly forgetting who the true God is. So we have the tragedy of forgetting. And then the stupidity of pride.

You see, after he's met with his elders and he's had a little pep talk, he feels a little bit more upbeat. A little bit of self-confidence never did anyone any harm.

Right? Well, Ben-Hadad seems equally confident. Verse 10. He sent another messenger to Ahab. 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.

I'm going to obliterate you, Ahab. I'm going to destroy you and your people and your cities from the face of the earth. Well, look at this for a slap-down response in verse 11.

The king of Israel answered, Tell him, One who puts on his armour should not boast like one who takes it off. Bring it on, big bad Ben.

[ 8 : 52 ] You and your 32 kings don't scare me. Threaten me all you like. But you haven't won the battle yet. Well, it's a display of self-confident pride, isn't it?

I can do this. An extra 32 kings? One king? I could take on 32 kings. I can win this. Now, we can look on and see the tragedy and stupidity of Ahab.

But the question is, can we see this same kind of thinking in our own hearts? Don't we, too, try to live self-determined lives?

Refusing to acknowledge God who is Lord over all? Arrogantly strutting our way through life as if we're sovereign over our lives and our world?

Listen to what the Apostle James would have to say many years later. It's there on the screen. Now listen, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go to this city or that city, spend a year there, move here, move there, carry on business, make money, take this job, say no to that job.

[10:18] Why? You do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

Instead, you ought to say, if it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that. As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes.

All such boasting is evil. You see, I can be just like Ahab. This is my life.

I can do it. I'm strong. I'm in control of my destiny. Nobody's going to tell me what to do. Well, forgetting who God is and making prideful boasts is never ever going to win the battle.

Second, how the battle is won. How the battle is won. Verse 13 through to 30.

[11:31] Let's read this passage together. How the battle is won. 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. But who will do this?

Asked Ahab. The prophet replied, this is what the Lord says. The junior officers under the provincial commanders will do it. And who's going to start the battle?

He asked. The prophet answered, you will. So Ahab summoned the 232 junior officers under the provincial commanders. Then he assembled the rest of the Israelites, 7,000 in all.

They set out at noon while Ben-Hadad and the 32 kings allied with him were in their tents getting drunk. The junior officers under the provincial commanders went out first.

[12:36] Now Ben-Hadad had dispatched scouts who reported, men are advancing from Samaria. He said, if they've come out for peace, take them alive.

If they've come out for war, take them alive. We're going to win this. No problem. The junior officers under the provincial commanders marched out of the city with the army behind them and each one struck down his opponent.

At that, the Arameans fled with the Israelites in pursuit. But Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, escaped on horseback with some of his horsemen. The king of Israel advanced and overpowered the horses and chariots and inflicted heavy losses on the Arameans.

afterwards, the prophet came to the king of Israel and said, strengthen your position and see what must be done because next spring the king of Aram will attack you again.

Meanwhile, the officials of the king of Aram advised him, their gods are gods of the hills. That is why they were too strong for us. But if we fight them on the plains, surely we will be stronger than they.

[13:52] And do this. Remove all the kings from their commands and replace them with the officers. Get rid of them. They lost the first battle. Verse 25. You must also raise an army like the one you lost.

Horse for horse. Chariot for chariot. So we can fight Israel on the plains. Then surely we will be stronger than they. He agreed with them and acted accordingly.

The next spring, Ben-Hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. It was a valley just outside. When the Israelites also mustered and given their provisions, they marched out to meet them.

The Israelites camped opposite them like two small flocks of goats while the Arameans covered the countryside. 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 the 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.

For seven days they camped opposite each other and on the seventh day the battle was joined. The battle began. The Israelites inflicted a hundred thousand casualties on the Aramean foot soldiers in one day.

[15 : 21] The rest of them escaped to the city of Aphek where the wall collapsed on 27,000 of them and Ben-Hadad fled to the city and hid in the inner room.

Well, there's lots of blowing and blustering isn't there from these two kings? But with all the noise and all the threats there is only one voice that needs to be heard.

verse 13 Meanwhile or suddenly in the midst of all this threat of war a prophet came to Ahab king of Israel announced this is what the Lord says.

If we're to see how the battle is won we need to listen to what God says. First it's a word of grace look at verse 13 the end of verse 13 he 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. It's the same as what happened when Ben-Hadad attacks a second time.

[16 : 44] Do you see it at the end of verse 28? I will deliver this vast army into your hands and you will know that I am the Lord. If the battle is going to be won God is going to do it.

I will give it into your hand. I will deliver this vast army into your hands. You would think that after Ahab's behaviour and the way he's carried on in Mount Carmel you would think God would say right Ahab you're on your own.

You're confident in your pride and in your boasting. Well off you go do it yourself. But that's not how God works. God doesn't act according to our behaviour or how good we are.

He acts according to his grace. God intervenes. He takes the initiative and the battle is won because God says I will do it.

Don't you find that incredible? Ahab has single handedly introduced Baal worship and led all the people away from God.

[17 : 55] He's ignored God. He's rejected God. Surely God should step away and leave him to his own devices. Yet God steps in and says I will fight the battle for you.

Glorious intervening grace. But how does God actually win the battle? Well first God chooses the foolish things to shame the wise.

He chooses the foolish things to shame the wise. Look at how this first battle is won in verse 14. Ahab's in a bit of a fluster. He says who's going to do it?

Who's going to win this battle? The prophet replied this is what the Lord says. The junior officers under the provincial commanders will do it.

Sorry? What did you say? The junior officers. I mean they're hardly out of college. They've never been in a battle. They don't even know how to throw a spear.

[19 : 08] How do they know what to do? They're not the kind of people you go to get and organize a fight. It all seems rather foolish. But to make sure we get the point the prophet of God keeps reminding us.

Verse 15 So Ahab summoned the 232 junior officers under the provincial commanders.  
Verse 17 The junior officers under the provincial commanders went out first.

Verse 19 The junior officers under the provincial commanders marched out of the city with the army behind them. I mean what's going to happen? Well verse 20 And each one struck down his opponent.

At that the Arameans fled with the Israelites in pursuit. Who would ever think a bunch of inexperienced officers could win a battle?

It all sounds foolish but they did because it was a battle God said he would win.

[20:18] So he chooses foolish things but God also wins the battle because he chooses the weak things to shame the strong. Look at how the second battle is won in verse 26 So Ben Hadad has kind of figured out that well you know we fought them up in the mountains they're too strong and the mountain gods are with them but let's get them down in the valleys and it's springtime because well it's neither too hot nor too cold there's plenty of food that's going to be the time to go to battle and we'll get new people on board and we'll be ready verse 26 the next spring Ben Hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel and when the Israelites were also mustered and given their provisions they marched out to meet them now picture picture what's going on here as they come down into the valley at one end you've got the

Israelites and they look like two small flocks of goats and then over on the other side the Arameans they covered the whole countryside this is a battle of the few versus the many Israel army is small insignificant and weak Aram's army is great magnificent in its military power and strong paddy power isn't going to give you great odds for an Israel win in this are they nothing glamorous or spectacular about Israel's army but this is God's battle and he uses weak things to shame the strong verse 29 so for seven days they camped opposite each other and on the seventh day the battle began the Israelites inflicted a hundred thousand casualties in one day the rest of them escaped to the city of Aphek where I guess they kind of crowded around the city and the walls came down and another twenty-seven thousand of them fell why does

God work like this why does he take foolish things and weak things well we're told aren't we at the end of verse 13 and it's also repeated at the end of verse 28 because you will know that I am the Lord Lord I will take weak things I will take foolish things and I'm going to win the battle and then you will know that I am the Lord I will win the battle for you to prove to you that I am God and I'm in control of this world and you are not you see Ahab is faced with a question and so are we when faced with the battle who are we going to trust am I going to fight with my own wisdom am I going to fight in my own strength or am

I going to trust the Lord am I going to get through life with this arrogant strutting around and saying I can manage I'm in control of my destiny I can do it you see as we journey through life we're in a battle but not a battle against Ben Hadad but a much greater battle against a greater enemy sin and Satan and because of our sin we are facing the consequences of sin judgment itself we are facing the results of what that judgment will be hell itself and how are we going to fight that kind of battle well we can fight on the basis of our pride

I can do this we can do in Ahab or we can turn and look and trust in God's grace you see just as God had won the battle for Ahab it is telling us and pointing us to the fact that well God is the one who wins the battle for us on our behalf keep your finger in 1 Kings chapter 20 and have a look at 1 Corinthians it is on page 1144 on page 1144 1 Corinthians chapter 18 you see God won the battle for us supremely on the cross he doesn't invite us to come and take part in the battle but he simply presents it and portrays it to us to say watch watch and see what happens watch what takes place and then you will know that

[26:07] I am the Lord 1 Corinthians 1 verse 18 the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God for it is written I will destroy the wisdom of the wise the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate down to verse 25 still speaking about the cross he says for the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength you see to the proud and the self-sufficient the battle that takes place on the cross is foolish and weak why would you trust a naked bloodied beaten up crucified and suffering man called

Jesus what can he do for you well through Jesus God won the battle didn't he sin is dealt with as Christ takes it upon himself Jesus takes the judgment as it falls on him he suffers hell for us and it is destroyed and death is defeated watch and see you can't win this battle but I will do it for you you see grace humbles us it says to us if you want to share in the battle's victory you need to submit to me rather than trust your own wisdom rather than rely on your own strength rather than do life in your own way you need to turn to me because

I am the Lord third how is Ahab going to respond to all of what God has done for him well third how to exclude yourself from the battle's victory how to exclude yourself from the battle's victory let's go back to 1 Kings chapter 20 and we'll pick it up in verse 31 so verse 31 his officials that's Ben Hadad's officials said to him look we have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful let us go to the king of Israel with sackcloth round our waist and ropes round our heads which was a sign of submission you won the battle where your servants perhaps he will spare your life wearing sackcloth round their waist and ropes round their heads they went to the king of

Israel and said your servant Ben Hadad says please let me live the king answered is he still alive he is my brother the men took this as a good sign and were quick to pick up on his word yes your brother Ben Hadad they said go and get him the king said when Ben Hadad came out Ahab bought him up into his chariot I will return the cities my father took from your father Ben Hadad offered and you may set up your own market areas in Damascus where we live and just as my father did in Samaria Ahab said on the basis of a treaty I will set you free so he made a treaty with him and let him go by the word of the Lord one of the company of the prophet said to his companion another prophet strike me with your weapon but he refused so the prophet said because you have not obeyed the

Lord as soon as you leave me a lion will kill you after that the man went away a lion found him and killed him the prophet then found another man and said strike me please so the man struck him and wounded him then the prophet went and stood by the road waiting for the king that's king Ahab he disguised himself with his headband down over his eyes as the king passed by the prophet called out to him your servant went into the thick of the battle and someone came to me with a captive and said guard this man if he is missing it will be your life for his life or you must pay a talent of silver which was years of wages basically it was impossible to pay off while your servant was busy here and there the man disappeared that is your sentence the king of Israel said you have pronounced it yourself then the prophet quickly removed his headband from his eyes and the king of

[31:52] Israel recognized him as one of the prophets he said to king Ahab 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 sullen and angry the king of Israel went to his palace in Samaria well Ahab doesn't respond as he should instead of sharing in the victory he actually excludes himself from the victory and becomes an enemy how did he do that well he made a treaty with the enemy it doesn't take a whole lot of brains to work out that Ben Hadad wanted rid of Ahab I mean he's tried twice he's already taken an army to him twice yes he's been defeated but instead of finishing him off

Ahab goes and does a deal with him end of verse 34 on the basis of a treaty I will set you free so he made a treaty with him and let him go from his enemy oh you're my brother from an attacker to you're my ally let's do business together what's going on well it seems Ahab feels he can get more and do more by keeping his enemies close to himself why get rid of your enemies when they can do good for you Ahab won't see it God had won the battle he had defeated the enemy so that Ahab would be loyal to God and to God alone that he would be devoted to him and worship him but Ahab isn't ready to submit to the one true God who won the battle for him you see we can't share our allegiance with another we either submit to

God or we reject him we are either with him or we are against him we can't live with a foot in both camps kind of going well you know Sundays is a good day to be with the Lord but the other days I'll do it my own way but he didn't just make a treaty did he making a treaty with the enemy was a sign of a much deeper and greater problem in Ahab's life disobedience to God's word now disobedience I mean it's not such a big deal is it it doesn't matter really if I just do my own thing and live my own way just okay I mean I'm not saying I'm going to live my own way all of the time but just some of the time that's alright isn't it just a little bit now and again well disobedience to God's word is literally deadly serious you see look at verse 35 36 we might find this punishment of this disobedient prophet a little bit harsh

I mean he's just been told cut me cut me no I'm not going to do that well a lion's going to come and kill you we kind of that we don't like hearing that do we are reading it but you know what it's not really what I think because look at the issue at hand verse 36 the prophet said because you have not obeyed the Lord as soon as you leave me a lion will kill you he didn't just make it up this was a message from the Lord this was a word from the Lord and he disobeyed it you see we can't just disobey God and think it doesn't matter this is God's world not my world it's my life he owns me and I am to live in obedience to my maker and my creator

I don't get to choose what I like and what I don't like what I want to obey and what I don't want to obey well the time comes for the prophet to confront Ahab with his disobedience I mean it's brilliant isn't it what a fabulous scene the prophet pretends to be a soldier put on a few raggedy old clothes somebody's cut him he's wiped the blood in his arms and his face there he is standing out on the side of the road it looks like he's been in battle verse 39 and as the king passed by the prophet called out to him your servant went into the thick of the battle and someone came to me with a captive and said guard this man if he is missing it will be your life for his life or you must pay a talent of silver well while your servant was busy here and there don't know what he was doing but he was doing something the man ran off he escaped the prisoner escaped basically he's asking

[37:39] Ahab what should the punishment be well look at the end of verse 40 that is your sentence the king of Israel said you have pronounced it yourself you should be killed your life for his life that's what happens when you disobey orders well without knowing Ahab has just pronounced his own sentence hasn't he the prophet reveals his true identity he takes off the mask presents himself to the king verse 42 this is what the lord says you Ahab have set a man free I determined should die therefore it is your life for his life your people for his people Ahab because you disobeyed the word of the true king you will die and tragically as we'll find out in the next couple of chapters it is his so called brother the king of Aram who finally ends

Ahab's life you see it's not safe to disobey God is it it's not wise to reject and ignore all that God has done Ahab through his own stubbornness has excluded himself from victory he's become the enemy at the very least he should have fallen down and submitted instead verse 43 he goes and sulks like a baby sullen and angry the king of Israel went off to his palace you see the problem is we all have sinful disobedient hearts we really don't obey as we ought to obey we like bits of the bible but not all the bits we read the parts that we think yeah I like that I can do that but don't ask me to do that we deserve to die we deserve to be judged but God in his grace has come to fight that battle for us and if we are to share in his victory if we are to share in the blessings of what

Christ has done for us on the cross in response we need to turn from our enemy and make that decisive break repent turn and go in the opposite direction bow the knee to the king submit to his word not make treaties and live with a foot in both camps turn from our arrogant pride and submit to the true king the king who went to the cross for us and said my life for your life the one who gives us the spoils the blessings of the victory forgiveness and peace and joy and the promise of his holy spirit that we would love him and obey him this is all yours you are now my children you are now part of my kingdom this is the king we can depend upon in every battle that we face if he's won the greatest battle of all and defeated sin and death itself well then whatever we face into in our life we have a king who will be with us and who will equip us my grace is sufficient for you and even when we come face to face with the battle of death itself he has reigned victorious from the grave he has won he is victorious he is heaven's champion wouldn't it be a tragedy to depend to depend on your own wisdom wouldn't it be stupidity to stand in your own strength and end up being excluded from the victory christ christ has won the battle he has called us to turn and make that decisive break from our enemy to submit to his word and follow him and enjoy the blessings that he is with us and we need not fear anything because he is lord over all let's pray he he let's he what he he says here he the word he