

Elijah ~ Part 14

In my last post, **Elijah** hears **The Lord's Message of Hope** in **1 Kings 19:15-21**. In this post, I had intended to focus on **God's Sentence to Ach'av** in **1 Kings 21:17-29**. However, the Lord had a different plan. As you can see, we are skipping over Chapter 20 and the first half of Chapter 21. The apparent reason is that **Elijah** doesn't make an appearance in these passages. However, I wanted to give you a brief synopsis of what we missed since it will come into play down the road. The following are highlights from Warren Wiersbe's Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament. I encourage you to read the text for yourselves.

Synopsis of Chapters 20 and 21:1-16

This was the first of two occasions when wicked **King Ach'av** showed a glimmer of spiritual understanding. Israel was coming out three years of famine when **Ben-Hadad, King of Syria**, decided to attack and take advantage of their plight. King David had defeated these northern nations, but these nations had gradually regained their independence.

Ben-Hadad gathered thirty-two other kings along with horses and chariots to wage war against **Samaria**. **Ben-Hadad** subdued **Samaria** and sent a messenger to **Ach'av** that he was next. **Ach'av** quickly capitulated to turn over the royal family and his wealth. Naturally, **Ben-Hadad** wanted more, and **Ach'av** found a backbone and said **NO**.

In opposing **Ben-Hadad**, **Ach'av** had nothing to stand on, but God in His grace sent him a message of hope: the Lord would give **Ach'av** the victory. The Lord wasn't doing this because **Ach'av** deserved it but because He wanted to honor His name before the wavering king of Israel and his people.

The Lord selected the district governors to lead the attack against **Syria**, and **Ach'av** was to lead the small army of 7,000 men. **Ach'av's** men caught the **Syrian** guards by surprise and proceeded to wipe out the **Syrian** military. **Ben-Hadad** jumped on his horse and escaped with his life. But because **Ach'av** believed God's Word and acted upon it, God gave him a great victory.

Another anonymous prophet spoke to **Ach'av** and cautioned him to strengthen his forces and be prepared for another invasion. While **Ach'av** was listening to God's message, **Ben-Hadad** was listening to his officers to explain **Syria's** great defeat.

Ben-Hadad's officers were bright men who knew it was worth the risk to appeal to **Ach'av's** pride. God had given the victory, but **Ach'av** would take the credit and claimed the spoils. **Ach'av** certainly enjoyed the "honor" he was receiving after the great victory, but not once did he give the glory to the Lord. To hear that **Ben-Hadad** was his servant made his heart glad, and he was more than willing to spare the man's life. Later, Hazeal would kill **Ben-Hadad** and become the king (2 Kings 8).

Ben-Hadad immediately entered into a treaty with **Ach'av** and gave back to Israel the cities his father had taken (1 Kings 15:20). He also gave **Ach'av** permission to sell Israel's produce and wares in the market at Damascus, which amounted to a trade agreement. That the king of Israel should make such a treaty with the enemy is remarkable, but **Ach'av** had no convictions (except those of his wife) and always took the easy way out of any situation. This treaty lasted three years (22:1).

The Lord couldn't allow **Ach'av** to disobey and get away with it, so He instructed one of the sons of the prophets to confront the king about his sin. The "**sons of the prophets**" were young men who had special prophetic gifts and met in groups to study with elder prophets like **Sh'mu'el**, **Elijah**, and **Elisha**. Knowing that he would have to catch **Ach'av** by surprise to get his attention, the man wisely set up an "action sermon" that would arouse the king's interest. The young man told a fellow student about God's orders and asked him to strike him with a weapon, but the man refused. We can understand a friend not wanting to injure a friend,

but like **Ach'av**, the young prophet was disobeying God, and it cost him his life. This certainly puts the fear of God into the other students, because the next one the young man approached was only too willing to comply. Disguised as a wounded soldier, he was ready to deliver his message.

In those days, a person could approach the king to help decide matters that needed legal clarification; and when **Ach'av** saw this *"injured soldier"* sitting by the side of the road, his curiosity was aroused. Hearing that the *"soldier"* had lost an important prisoner of war and would have to forfeit his life or pay an enormous fine, the king replied, **"So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it."** The king could have granted the man a pardon and saved his life, but he preferred to let him die. *But in so doing, Ach'av was declaring his guilt and passing sentence on himself.* This is reminiscent of **David** and **Natan** regarding **Bat-Sheva**.

How did **Ach'av** not recognize that the young man was one of the sons of the prophets? It's not likely that **Ach'av** was that close to **Eliyahu's** followers to know them personally. When the bandage was removed, did it reveal some identifying mark? Had **Ach'av** seen the man on **Mount Karmel**? We have no way of knowing, but the sight must have shocked the king. The man that **Ach'av** judged now became **Ach'av's** judge and announced that one day the **Syrians** would slay **Ach'av**. But instead of repenting and seeking the Lord's forgiveness, **Ach'av** went home and pouted like a child.

Breaking God's Laws

Ben-Hadad was the man **Ach'av** should have killed, but he set him free, and **Naboth** was the man **Ach'av** should have protected, but **Ach'av** killed him! When you sell yourself to do evil, you call evil good and good evil, light darkness and darkness light (Isaiah 5:20). The infamous episode of **Naboth's** vineyard reveals the lawlessness of **King Ach'av** and his evil wife, **Izevel**. Consider the sins they committed and consequently the commandments of God that they disdained and disobeyed. Not only were they idolaters, but they also coveted after their neighbor's vineyard leading to Izevel plotting his death to take his land.

If ever two people were guilty of blaspheming God and breaking His laws, it was **Ach'av** and **Izevel**, and judgment was about to fall.

In my next post, we continue to explore the Biblical story of **Eliyahu**. We will return to **Eliyahu** as he hears **God's Sentence to Ach'av** in **1Kings 21:17-29**.