

Speaking Truth to Power:  
The Prophet Elijah, #4

## A Failed King and a Great God 1 Kings 20

--CEFC 2/3/20

(Read 1 Kings 20)

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In that last three weeks, we've been looking at the activities of the prophet Elijah, but as we turn to 1 Kings 20 the focus shifts from Elijah, the Lord's prophet, to Ahab, Israel's king.

In fact, Elijah is not mentioned in this morning's passage at all.

Chapters 20, 21, and 22 all portray the failure of Israel's king to live faithfully before the Lord.

Now, why should we be interested in this bit of ancient history concerning the political fortunes of the royal leader of a rather insignificant nation?

Ahab's story is important because the Lord God, the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, has determined that the king of Israel was to be a representative figure through which he would deal with that nation.

And he had determined that Israel would be a representative people through which he would deal with all peoples, for Israel had been put in the place of Adam,

who in the beginning stood as the representative of all humanity.

You see the progression—

Adam, Israel, and the king of Israel.

In the sight of God, these are all representative figures

through whom God is dealing with us as human beings.

We are to see ourselves in those figures—

they give us insight into who we are—

how we think, how we act,

and what God thinks of and how God acts toward us.

The Lord's interactions with Adam, with Israel, and with the king of Israel

help us see who God is

and who we are,

and, therefore, help us to see what we should do.

So as we go to 1 Kings 20

we'll see something of ourselves in the king, I'm sure.

But my focus will be on what this story tells us about God—

and, all along, we will consider the difference this ought to make in our lives.

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The first verse of 1 Kings 20, sets the scene and initiates the action—

20:1—**"Now Ben-hadad king of Aram**

[Aram is roughly modern Syria—north and west of Israel]

**[Ben-hadad] mustered his entire army.**

**Accompanied by thirty-two kings**

[these would have been rulers of cities under Ben-hadad's control]  
[Accompanied by thirty-two kings] with their horses and chariots,  
he went up and besieged Samaria and attacked it.”

Chap. 19 referred to the coming of God's judgment against Israel for their idolatry,  
and we wonder if this is the beginning of that judgment.

Ben-hadad's army was a formidable force—so things look bad for King Ahab.

He appears trapped in his capital city—  
a city, I remind you, where he had built a temple to worship Baal.

The Aramean king sends his messenger to Ahab with a proclamation—

“Thus says Ben-hadad--

3           ‘Your silver and gold are mine,  
and the best of your wives and children are mine.’”

Ben-hadad acts like a Mafia boss in asserting his control of Ahab's kingdom.

“Ahab, you belong to me.”

Ahab, who couldn't stand up to his wife Jezebel earlier,  
can't stand up to Ben-hadad either--

v. 4—He replies, “Just as you say, my lord the king.  
I and all I have are yours.”

“Yes, you're right—I won't fight it—  
you are my master.”

Ahab accepts this insult to his independent rule  
and recognizes his vassal status—

he is servile, compliant, groveling, and obsequious.

And already we are suspicious—

Ahab makes no attempt to seek the Lord Yahweh in this crisis—

Israel's almighty God who had displayed his great power on Mount Carmel.

In fact, Ahab treats Ben-hadad as his "lord."

And things only get worse in his dealings with this bully from the north.

Not content with just an assertion of control,

Ben-hadad wants to escalate the conflict.

He sends another messenger:

v.5-- **"Thus says Ben-hadad:**

**'I sent to demand your silver and gold, your wives and your children.**

**6 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.'"**

I don't just want your submission, I want your stuff,

and I want it now!

You've got 24 hours to comply or else!

Again, Ahab doesn't go the Lord God.

Instead, he goes to the elders of the land for support—

**"See how this man is looking for trouble!"** he says.

I should say so!

With the strong resolve of the elders and the people to resist this aggression,

Ahab replies to Ben-hadad, in a still rather subservient manner—

**"Tell my lord the king,**

**'Your servant will do all you demanded the first time,**

but this demand I cannot meet.”

The king of Aram is incensed that his power has been resisted.

He sends his messenger back 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.”**

This pagan curse sounds a lot like Jezebel’s reaction to Elijah.

Ben-hadad intends to smash Israel to smithereens.

Ahab then seeks to get the last word with a surprising bit of bravado.

He responds with a proverbial statement that is hard to take seriously—

**‘You tell your master,’** he says to Ben-hadad’s envoy,  
**‘One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off.’**”

“Hey, Chump!—

“Don’t count your chickens before they hatch”

“It’s not the one who starts the fight,

but the one who finishes it.

So there! Take that!”

OK, we’ll see.

As you can imagine, Ahab’s trash talk was not received well.

We read that Ben-hadad and the kings **“were drinking in their tents,”**

relaxed and supremely confident.

When he got the message,

you can just imagine them laughing in scorn

at this little upstart puppet king

They were eager to attack with overwhelming force.

Again, things look bad for Ahab. /

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But in v. 13 a new character unexpectedly enters the story—

Our translation introduces him with the word “**Meanwhile.**”

That seems too tame—

“Look!” or “Suddenly!” or “Wait a minute!” seems more to the point.

A prophet arrives on the scene!

Where did he come from?

and what kind of prophet is he?

We don’t expect a prophet **of the Lord**—

Most of them had been wiped out by Jezebel,

the others had been hiding in caves,

and Elijah was somewhere, but this was not Elijah.

He wouldn’t be described as “**one prophet**”<sup>1</sup> as this one is.

But as soon as he opens his mouth,

we realize that this prophet had to be

one of those 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

“**Thus says the LORD,**” he pronounces,

**‘Do you see this vast army?**

**I will give it into your hand today,**

**and then you** [this is singular—“you, Ahab”]

<sup>1</sup> d#DjRa ay∞Ibîn

then you will know that I am the LORD.”

What had Ahab done to deserve this?

Why should the Lord come to Ahab's defense?

And even more important,

why should Ahab need to see the defeat this foreign army

in order to know that Lord is God?

He had been on Mount Carmel.

He had seen the fire from heaven.

He was there when the people cried out, “The LORD—he is God!

The LORD—he is God!”

Wasn't that enough?

Ahab had done nothing to stop Jezebel's threat to Elijah's life.

And now in the face of this military crisis—this attacking army—

he had not sought the LORD.

Why should the LORD give Ahab yet another chance

to recognize who he was

and to offer him the devotion he is due?

Isn't this unexpected announcement an act of pure grace!

There is no good reason why should the Lord deal with Ahab in this way

because God's grace never has an explanation

outside of his own desire

to display something of his own character.

God's grace always begins with God and not with us.

This prophet wasn't summoned;

he simply appears.

The religions of the world speak of man's search for God;

the Bible speaks of God's search for man.

God in his grace, seeks us out,

and in his mercy he gives us what we don't deserve.

So it was with King Ahab,

and so it was with Israel,

and so it is with us in Jesus Christ.

If the story had said that Ahab was wiped out by the Arameans

we would have thought nothing of it,

for Ahab had been given every chance to turn to the LORD,

and he had refused.

The Lord had every right to turn him over to his own devices—

and to abandon him to his enemies.

But he doesn't.

He doesn't.

And that is grace.

So I ask,

How many times does the Lord have to keep revealing himself to you

before you will acknowledge him

and devote your life to him?

How many blessings from his hand

must you receive before you trust him?

and obey him?

and truly love him?

What will it take?

The Lord was gracious to Ahab,

and I dare say, the Lord has been gracious to you.

Respond to him with the humble thanks and praise that he deserves.

His grace is nothing short of amazing.

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Let's get back to the story.

In v. 14 Ahab has some questions for this prophet of the Lord—

**“But who will do this?” asked Ahab.**

Who is going to win this battle?

The answer, again, is surprising--

**The prophet replied, “Thus says the Lord:**

**‘The junior officers under the provincial commanders will do it.’”**

The **“junior officers”**—the inexperienced **“youths”**—

not what you would expect against such a menacing fighting force.

**“And who will start the battle?” he asked.**

**The prophet answered, “You will.”**

So Ahab assembles his troops—a mere 7,000 compared to Ben-hadad's vast army.<sup>2</sup>

And at noon, he initiates the attack,

<sup>2</sup> cf. v. 13-- **hᵢRΩzAh lwëødî...gAh NwñømDhRh**

while the enemy officers **“were in their tents getting drunk.”**

And we may see that effects of that inebriation

in the rather baffling and incoherent order

Ben-hadad gives his troops--

**“If they have come out for peace, take them alive;**

**if they have come out for war, take them alive.”**

But Ben-hadad’s army doesn’t take anybody alive—

Led by the young officers, Ahab’s forces take the field and win the day,

and the Arameans fled, suffering heavy losses.

Game over.

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But not so fast—

the game is not over, because Ben-hadad king of Aram had escaped,

and lived to fight another day.

This leads to the prospect of a renewed conflict,

and in the next scene, each king receives counsel from his advisors.

Again unsolicited, the prophet comes to Ahab

and urges him to prepare for a new attack in the spring.

While Ban-had’s officials offer military strategy

based on a theological assessment.

**“Get rid of those 32 kings—they didn’t know what they were doing—**

**and they seemed to enjoy drinking more than fighting.**

**and re-equip your troops.**

But this time, you choose the ground on which to fight.

You see, we've figured out what went wrong—

**“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.”**

Here again, we are encountering a battle of the gods—

which is what I said at the beginning of our study of Elijah

was the central theme of his ministry.

His name means “My God is the LORD”—

The Lord is God and there is no other.

But here these Aramean war strategists don't get that.

They are adherents of that pagan notion of the territorial god.

To them, the gods are like drug cartel bosses who each control their own turf.

And evidently, in their mind—the LORD, Yahweh, the god of the Israelites

had a pretty strong hold on the hill country.

Maybe they had heard something about that fiery display on Mount Carmel,

and that last battle in the hill country of Samaria had not gone well.

So let's not go back there.

But, they reasoned,

if we just engage Israel down on the plains, we should be fine—

There Baal can more than hold his own.

Ben-hadad saw the great wisdom of his advisors,

so next spring he enticed the Israelites to the plain of Aphek to fight.

When the time for war came,

Ahab mustered his army,

but again, they were greatly out-numbered.

Their camp seemed **“like two small flocks of goats,**

**while the Arameans covered the countryside.”**

But in v. 28—through his prophet, this **“man of God,”**

the Lord intervenes.

Again, there is no indication that Ahab sought the Lord—

the movement is all one-way.

**“Thus says the Lord:”** proclaims the prophet,

**‘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.”**

This time that **“you”** is plural—

This display of God’s power was for all the people.

The Mount Carmel fireworks display was not enough for them either--  
any more than the ten plagues in Egypt

and then the parting of the Red Sea

was enough for Israel in the days of Moses.

But somehow, the Lord, in his great grace, was willing, once again,

to make himself known to them.

And here this gracious display was especially designed

to make a particular theological point—

the Lord was going to answer the lie that he was a god of the hills  
and not of the valleys. /

Now, we, in our modern sophistication, look at this pagan notion of territorial gods  
with utter disdain and contempt.

It's a ridiculous idea, hardly needing rebuttal.

But I'm not so sure that we don't implicitly live with this pagan conception  
more than we realize.

We believe the Lord is a god of the hills and not of the valleys  
when allow him to influence our private lives—  
at home and on the weekends,  
but not our public lives at work Monday through Friday.

Or we believe the Lord is a god of the hills and not of the valleys  
when we think he can somehow concern himself with the flow of world history,  
but he doesn't really have much to do  
with the day-to-day details of our lives.

Or we believe the Lord is a god of the hills and not of the valleys,  
when the opposite is the case—  
when we think God can deal with my personal needs,  
but he can't manage the affairs of nations.

Do we simply operate with a refined sort of paganism  
when we live as if the Lord is a god of one part of life  
and not of another?

The Lord won't have it—

he is the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth.

He is God, and there is no other.

And he will demonstrate that to Israel—

and to us.

And how often he shows it by using our weakness to display his power.

In this case, the weakness of this puny army—

an army that huddled on the hillside like two small flocks of goats.

God's power is most clearly seen in our weakness.

And here once again the Lord is victorious.

When the battle is joined, the Arameans are routed<sup>3</sup>—

and in a manner reminiscent of that famous battle of Jericho,

after waiting seven days, the walls of the city of Aphek collapsed,

killing all inside.

So much for that ridiculous idea that the LORD is just a god of the hills.

They needed to get that notion out of their heads,

and so should we.

The Lord is God and there is no other.

How can we not put our ultimate trust in him alone.

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Despite the weakness—the political, military, and spiritual weakness—of King Ahab,

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the 100,000 casualties, see Wiseman (TOTC). This number may be symbolic of a massive number (the total Aramean army group at Qarqar was 62,900). Also, the “thousand” might be re-vocalized without change of consonants to mean “officer.” One hundred casualties a day in ancient warfare was heavy. Also, the 27,000 killed in Aphek would include everyone in the city when the wall fell—as at Jericho—or the number might represent 27 officers killed.

the Lord has revealed himself.

We've seen the Lord's **amazing grace**;

and we've witnessed the Lord's **almighty power**.

But our story has one more aspect of his character to put on display,

and again, it is seen in contrast to the actions of Ahab.

Israel had once again won the battle,

but once again, the enemy king had escaped and remained hidden.

His officials come to him with an idea—

v. 31--“Look, **we have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful**.

**Let us go to the king of Israel with sackcloth around our waists**

**and ropes around our heads.**

**Perhaps he will spare your life.”**

We know of a number of places in the Old Testament

where Israel's kings had displayed mercy—

I think particularly of the way David showed mercy to Saul's family

after he became king.

Perhaps these officials had heard some of these stories.

They present this idea of begging for mercy as Ben-hadad's best option.

It doesn't actually say that this proud king agrees to this,

but we read that they went to Ahab on his behalf.

This time there is no more of this “Thus says Ben-hadad”!

Look who is groveling now--

They say to Ahab, “**Your servant Ben-hadad says:**

**‘Please let me live.’ ”**

How does Ahab respond to this plea?

v. 32--“**Is he still alive? He is my brother.**”

Note first, that Ahab doesn’t consult the Lord.

No, he seems flattered by the king’s humble submission—

for now Ahab is no longer the vassal servant.

No, he is now one of the big boys!

He seems excited that he can now be considered as an equal

to this great king of Aram.

“**He is my brother,**” he says.

These diplomatic envoys are quick to pick up on this hopeful sign,

as if it were an omen from their god—

“**Yes, your brother Ben-hadad!” they said.**

“Go and get him,” Ahab orders.

When Ben-hadad came out,

Ahab had him come up into his chariot.”--

Ben-hadad is given a place of honor—

as if these two kings were of the same rank and status.

Ben-hadad rushes to take advantage of his opportunity--

“Let’s make a deal!”

v. 34 --“I will return the cities my father took from your father,” he offered.

“You may set up your own market areas in Damascus,

as my father did in Samaria.”

Such a deal!—a return of land and new business prospects!

How could Ahab say No?

**“On the basis of a treaty I will set you free.” he says.**

**“So he made a treaty [a covenant<sup>4</sup>] with him, and let him go.” /**

Now at this point, Ahab has got to be feeling really good about himself.

I mean, think about it.

He was making Israel great again!

With not one but two great military victories,

he has secured the peace with a hated enemy.

He had bargained back captured land

and signed a new trade deal with great prospects

for significant economic expansion.

And on top of that, Ahab had acquired a reputation as merciful monarch.

What more could he want?

But our passage will end with a very strange and surprising episode.<sup>5</sup>

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Look at v. 35-- **By the word of the LORD one of the company of the prophets**

**said to his companion,**

**“Strike me with your weapon,” but he refused.**

**36 So the prophet said, “Because you have not obeyed the LORD,**

**as soon as you leave me a lion will kill you.”**

**And after the man went away, a lion found him and killed him.”**

<sup>4</sup> tyâîrV;b

<sup>5</sup> So Woodhouse.

OK.

A little unusual—but it is reminiscent of a similar story back in chap. 13,  
which I will let you look up at your leisure.

But already, you get a hint of what is to come—  
what appears to be an act of kindness has disastrous consequences.

But there is more—

v. 37—"The prophet found another man and said, "Strike me, please."

So the man struck him and wounded him."

Smart move!

38" Then the prophet went and stood by the road waiting for the king.

He disguised himself with his headband down over his eyes.

39 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.'

[A talent of silver was a hundred times what slave was worth  
and it was far beyond what any soldier could ever pay.]

40 "While your servant was busy here and there," he says,

"the man disappeared."

This seems to be a plea for mercy on the part of the soldier,  
but the king will have none of it.

"That is your sentence," the king of Israel said.

"You have pronounced it yourself."

That is, "it will be your life for his life,"

It was a common ploy of the prophets

when approaching a king with a bit of bad news

to tell him a story that draws a response

that is then turned back upon the king.

Nathan had once done that with King David (2 Sam. 12:1-6).

And that's just what happens here--

v. 41—"Then the prophet quickly removed the headband from his eyes,

and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets.

42 He said to the king, "Thus says the Lord:

'You have set free a man I had determined should die.

Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people.'"

Does this trouble you?

Ahab showed mercy to this foreign king

and now he and his people stand condemned for it. /

My son Will has an exercise that he gives his undergraduate students

in his Old Testament Survey course.

He has them identify the passage in the Bible

that seems to them the most difficult or offensive or troubling

which they are to bring to class to discuss.

And for each passage, he asks them in class what they think

the biblical author thought of what he had written.

Did the author find it difficult or offensive or troubling?

Without exception, the answer is No.

And he then asks,

Why would the biblical author think of this statement or event

in a way different than you?

It's a way of teasing out the hidden assumptions we bring to the Bible

that influence the way we react to what we read.

So let's apply that to this text.

In reading this passage,

what the prophet says is described as a **“word of the Lord,”**

he uses the expression, **“Thus says the Lord,”**

and what he says will happen, does happen,

suggesting he is a true prophet.

According to the Biblical writer—

this is God's word we're dealing with here,

and God's word is always true and must be obeyed.

But how can that be?

Why do we find this condemnation of Ahab so objectionable?

We might say, Doesn't Jesus tell us to love our enemies, not kill them.

And that's true.

But we are not living under the same dispensation of the law

as the Israelites at the time of Ahab.

Jesus brings a new stage in God's dealings with sinners—

he is calling everyone everywhere to repent.

Now we are to leave judgment in the hands of God.

But in Israel, the king was an instrument of that judgment of God.

But I suspect there is a deeper reason that we may be offended by what we read here.

And it is the widespread use in our culture

of what has been called an “ethic of empathy.”

Our judgments are not based on any standards—divine or otherwise.

It’s just a matter of how we feel about something,

or about how some action will make other people feel.

We don’t even want to hurt anyone’s feelings,

much less condemn them to die.

Our moral judgments are based on this feeling of empathy toward others—

we don’t want them to feel bad about themselves.

But that’s a dangerous way to make moral judgments.

What kind of parent would you be if you didn’t discipline your two-year old

because you were afraid to hurt his feelings?

But more deeply, I think of a recent quote from NFL quarterback Aaron Rogers--

[and how could I not quote a football player on Super Bowl Sunday!]

He said,

“I don’t know how you can believe in a god

who wants to condemn most of the planet to a fiery hell.

Like what type of loving, sensitive, omnipresent, omnipotent being

wants to condemn most of his beautiful creation

to a fiery hell at the end of all this?”<sup>6</sup>

Notice, Rogers is saying,

<sup>6</sup> <https://fanbuzz.com/nfl/aaron-rogers-interview-religion/>

“How can you not feel sorry for all those people?

How would they feel?

Sending them to hell is not something I would do,

so how could I believe in a god who would do it?”

It’s an ethic of empathy.

But why should our feelings about something

be the standard by which to judge God?

The biblical writers think differently—

It is God’s perspective—based in his holy character—

that guides their thinking,

and that’s what often makes our thinking different than theirs.

For hadn’t the Lord said to the people of Israel--

When you enter the promised land

and drive out nations larger and stronger than you

“**then you must destroy them totally.**

**Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy**”

for they will surely lead you to worship their gods (Deut. 7:2-4).

But that’s just what Ahab had done.

He made a treaty with this pagan king, and let him go.

**‘You have set free a man I had determined should die.’**

That’s what the Lord said.

Does the Lord God really speak this way?

Jesus certainly did.

I am sorry, Mr. Rogers, but our Lord Jesus did speak about hell.

In that parable we read earlier—

Jesus has the king say to his attendants regarding those who weren't

dressed properly for the wedding banquet,

in other words, who were disqualified for entry into the kingdom of God,

**“Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness,**

**where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”** (Mt. 22:13).

“Oh, I would never do such a thing!” you might say.

“And I just can't believe in a god who would treat people like that!

How would those poor people feel, getting thrown out

**into the darkness,**

**where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!”**

I'm sorry, but your empathy does not matter.

The Bible speaks very clearly of a holy God who judges sinners.

He had determined that Ben-hadad deserved to die,

and now he declares the same for Ahab.

For that is what disobedience to God deserves.

Beware of an “ethic of empathy,”

for our passage affirms that there can be a time

when our enlightened actions of “mercy”

and our shallow professions of “brotherhood”

can be a betrayal of our God,<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> So Nelson.

and he will not approve.

Yes, here we see **the Lord's severe judgment.**

Do you believe it?—

that God has the right to judge even the merciful Ahab

for his disobedience to the word of God?

Do you believe that he has the right to judge you?

Ahab heard this word of judgment,

but instead of convicting his heart

and leading him to repentance,

we read that he became "**sullen and angry.**"

I think that is exactly how lots of people react

to hearing of the reality of the judgement of God.

Don't go there—

turn to God and cast yourself on his mercy—

a mercy that only he is qualified to give.

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We're going to come to this communion table this morning,

but before we do, I'd like to make a final reflection on our passage—

We've seen how Ahab fails as Israel's king—

He fails to seek the Lord, and to know him as the one true God.

He fails to trust him and to live righteously before him

in obedience to his word.

He fails to deal decisively with evil in the form of this king,  
as the Lord had commanded Israel to do.

But have to ask, will Israel ever have a godly king?—

a king who will represent them righteously before God  
and who would be God's instrument to defeat their enemies  
and bring them under God's gracious rule?

This communion table points us to the Lord Jesus Christ as that King—

a king who not only represents us before God  
but who also is God coming down to us  
doing for us what we could never do for ourselves—  
for on the cross Jesus displays the **amazing grace** of our God—  
for while we were still sinners he died for our sin.

and on the cross Jesus displays the **almighty power** of God—

for there he defeats the power of the devil and death itself.

And on the cross Jesus displays the **severe judgment** of God—

for in his death he endured the death we deserve,  
He bore the judgment of God on our behalf,  
so that we could be forgiven.

Yes, Ahab in a perverse way, points us to Jesus—

May we now come to this table and give thanks that we have a King  
who will represent us well before our God.

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Let's pray as our servers come forward.

Prayer--

Here this morning, we are not battling against a foreign king—

but we do battle with the spiritual forces of evil

and the sinful desires of our own flesh

and surely this passage reminds us that we are to put to death

all that is not holy in our own hearts—

we can make no treaty with the devil—

no deals!

We must put to death those desires of the flesh,

those demonic temptations that confront us.

Give us the courage, the strength and the power to do so.

We thank you for the gospel—from which that power comes—

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

IN your grace, in your power—as we are aware of your righteous judgment

against all that opposes your holy nature.

**Communion**

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Speaking Truth to Power:

The Prophet Elijah, #4

Feb. 3, 2020

## A Failed King and a Great God

### 1 Kings 20

The people of Israel had asked for a king, and the Lord gave them one. But in rejecting the Lord as King, what they received is what they deserved. This section of 1 Kings shows us a failed king, even as it displays a great God.

#### I. The Lord's Amazing Grace (vv. 1-22)

*"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.'"* (v. 13)

#### II. The Lord's Almighty Power (vv. 23-30)

*"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.'"* (v. 28)

#### III. The Lord's Severe Judgment (vv. 31-43)

*“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.” (v. 42)*

Who will be God’s True King?

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Sermon Response:

## A Failed King and a Great God

1 Kings 20

•How does this passage reveal the grace of God? What has the Lord done to convince you that the LORD is God?

•How are you tempted to see the Lord as a territorial god—a god of the hills but not of the valley? What are areas where you often don't think of God actually working?

•How does Ahab present us with a bad example that is to be avoided?

•What do you make of the strange story at the end of this chapter (vv. 35-43)? Do you sympathize with Ahab? Do you think that what God says to him is just?

•Why is an “ethic of empathy” (being concerned with how we or other people feel about something) a dangerous way to make moral judgments?

•Take some time praying about the lessons of this passage and praise the God it presents. Thank him for the King he has given us in Jesus Christ—one who will fight our battles and bring us into God's glorious kingdom. Pray also for “gospel conversations” with those God puts in your path this week.

