

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 15, Part 3

1 Kings 19-20, Part 3

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God, once again, acts graciously for Ahab, exactly as the prophet had said it was going to happen again. And the question of the character and nature of God is made clearer in this second deliverance because the Aramean advisors said, well, you know why we lost that battle? It's because we were fighting up there in the hills of Samaria, up there in that mountainous region, and Yahweh obviously is a God of the hills. So next time, let's fight in the plains, and Yahweh won't have power there.

Well, of course, Yahweh is not the God of the hills. He's the God of the universe. So, once again, the issue is who Yahweh is. That was the issue there on Mount Carmel.

It was the issue outside the gates of Samaria. It's the issue now on the plains of Aphek, which are east of the Sea of Galilee. That's the question for you and me.

It's the unending question: who is Yahweh? Who is Yahweh in your life? Who's Yahweh in my life? Is he the I am? Is he the source of all we are and do and think? Or is he a rabbit's foot, a good luck charm, somebody to keep in the drawer for emergencies? Who is Yahweh? That was the question for Ahab. It was the question for Israel in those days. It's the question that runs through this middle section of the books of Kings.

Once again, look at God's motive in doing this in verse 28. Now, notice this time, it's the man of God. So maybe this is Elijah.

Now, the man of God came up and told the king of Israel. This is what Yahweh says because the Arameans think Yahweh is a God of the hills and not a God of the valleys. I will deliver this vast army into your hands. You will know that I am Yahweh.

Well, the advisors had not only told Ben-Hadad to array his army in a flat area, a level area. They also told him, interestingly, stop using 32 kings and get 32 commanders. He has reorganized his army.

So, he's reorganized his army. He chose what he thought was a more favorable site for the conquest. And he has clearly massed thousands and thousands of armies.

Notice verse 27. When the Israelites were also mustered and given provisions, they marched out to meet them. The Israelites camped opposite them like two small flocks of goats while the Arameans covered the countryside.

Here it is again, an unequal combat. So, the Aramean king, the Syrian king, has done everything he knows. He's chosen a favorable site for the combat.

He has reorganized his army, and he's gathered an abundance of soldiers. I mean, it's over. It's over, except for one thing.

Yahweh, are you facing a situation like that in your own life? It's over. Everything ranged against you is simply unconquerable, except for one thing. Yahweh is with you.

Is he? Have you, in fact, cast yourself upon him? Have you, in fact, found in him the grace and the strength of Christ? I can do all things, Paul says. Yes. Yes.

So, what happened? A tremendous, tremendous Israelite victory. That huge Syrian army ran away. They ran into the city of Aphek, and there, the wall fell on a bunch of them, and they died.

Finally, Ben-Hadad, the king, who's now twice taken on Ahab, twice insulted him. Ben-Hadad is in the city in an innermost room, and the Hebrew emphasizes that he's an inner room in the inner part of the city.

He is hiding. Now, notice what comes next. His officials said to him, look, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel do have said NIV says are merciful.

Here's this word that we've talked about before. This word really can't be translated into English in a single word. Hmm.

Isn't it interesting how we can run on momentum? The kings of Israel have learned something from God. They have learned how to be gracious. They have learned how to be kind.

Even in Ahab. Oh, oh, I think of our own country. I'm speaking in January of 2021, a week after the.

Tragic mobbing of the Capitol building, I have thought again and again this week of what a young Russian man said to me now, 25 years ago. He met me at the airport in Moscow. And as we were picking up the bags and going to the car, he said, I've been in America.

I said, oh, really? He said, yes, yes. I visited Kansas City. I said, oh, he said, you know what impresses me about Americans? I said, no, they are so law-abiding.

Why? Because of this culture, this culture has been raised in this book. This culture has been raised on the idea that there is a God who has an intention for human life. And whether anybody's watching us.

Whether there are any policemen around, we're responsible to God for our behavior. Folks, we've been running on momentum for 50, 60, 70 years. The momentum is running out unless we recover our attachment to that great flywheel, which is God; the wheel is going to run down.

So, we've heard, we've heard that these kings of Israel act like Yahweh. Maybe there's a chance. Now, I need to ask you a question.

Because it's implicit in what comes next, it's not explicit. It's implicit.

Who won these battles? No, Ahab. To the victor belong the spoils. And the victors can choose to be gracious or they can choose not to be gracious.

Yahweh won these battles. Ben-Hadad has been the implacable enemy of God's people. Twice now, he has asserted his right to do whatever he wishes with the people of God.

In whose hands is Ben-Hadad? King Ben-Hadad is in the city, sir. Oh, really? Is he still alive? He's my brother. Oh, yes, yes, yes.

He is your brother. Come up into my chariot here. I'll gladly give you a market space in Damascus.

I will gladly give back the land that my fathers and I took from you. Well, that's wonderful. Let's make a covenant.

Why not? Ahab has won the battle. The Syrians are clearly not going to be a threat for a long time to come. Why not be gracious? And then you have this bizarre story that follows.

A prophet said, strike me with your weapon. Now, the guy said, I'm not going to do that. Well, you've disobeyed the Lord.

And as soon as you leave here, a lion is going to get you. Wow. He found another man.

Strike me. The guy said, OK, and wounded him. The Prophet went and stood by the road, waiting for the king.

He disguised himself by pulling his headband down over his eyes, wearing a mask like most of us these days. As the king passed by, the prophet called out to him and told him a story.

He said, because I was wounded, I was I was back in the in the rear area. And one of the soldiers came by with this very valuable prisoner and said, here, keep this guy. Keep this guy.

You can't do anything else, you can't fight, you're wounded, but you keep him for me while I go win this battle. But again, you just have to love the Bible while I was doing this and that. While I was not attending to business, while I was not focused on the main thing, the guy got away.

Ahab says, hey, don't talk to me. You brought this on yourself. And Ahab recognizes him.

This is what the Lord says. You have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore, it's your life for his life, your people for his people.

Sullen and angry. The king of Israel went back to his palace in Samaria. We're going to see that phrase again next week.

It tells us something about Ahab. There is a recrudescence if I can use that word. There's a hangover from his biblical faith.

If he were simply outright pagan, he would kill that prophet and take care of that problem. But no, no, he knows you can't do that, so all he can do is be sullen and angry. How dare God do this to me? I don't deserve this.

But perhaps we say, well, now, wait a minute. Wait a minute. Ahab is gracious when Yahweh was going to be vicious.

And how did Ahab know that Ben-Hadad was in God's hands? I think the whole point of chapter 20 is to say that's precisely it. Ahab had no real heartfelt sensitivity to Yahweh and Yahweh's work and Yahweh's will. Yahweh intended to deliver Israel from this enemy.

And Ahab left him in place, and he, in fact, would be then responsible for Ahab's death. Oh, we do not know the future. It's very easy for us to say, well, God shouldn't do that.

God shouldn't do this. But underneath all of that, we see a man who has not learned that Yahweh is God. He has not learned that Yahweh owns the universe.

He has not learned that we are instruments in his hands. Oh, not merely instruments, persons in his hands. He has not learned to come to God seeking God's will and God's way.

He has simply taken God's gifts for granted and used them as though they were his own. God have mercy upon us. Help us not to fall into those pits.

Help us to know that God is God. He is the I am, and our lives are in his hands for good. God bless you.