

1 Kings 20

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[0 : 0 0] Tonight, good to see you. We're back in One Kings. We were studying One Kings last year, I think, a few months ago, so it's good to be back in One and Two Kings for a while.

And the message that we're being shown tonight in this passage is that Jesus Christ is the King who eradicates all evil. Jesus is the King whose victory over evil is comprehensive and thorough and complete.

And his is a kingdom of absolute peace. No evil, no wrongdoing will ever survive in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Now, it's quite a long passage, isn't it? One Kings chapter 20. So there isn't time to go through all of the details. But tonight we're going to take a look at three kings in this passage. Three kings who have very different responses to evil in their kingdoms.

The three kings in the passage are Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, who were introduced to in verse one. Then King Ahab, who is the king of Israel at this time. And then King Jesus, the king of kings.

[1 : 1 6] Three kings and their responses to evil. So first of all, we see the king who is evil. The king who is evil. This is Israel in about 860 BC. And we're told, first of all, about a king, Ben-Hadad, in verse one, aren't we?

And Ben-Hadad is the king of Syria. And he comes to attack Israel. He besieges Samaria, the city. And most of Ben-Hadad's story is the time during this siege.

We read that he's hanging around in his booths, in his tents, encamped with his army around the city. And there is no nice way of putting it. Ben-Hadad is evil.

As you look at him, you see the essence of what evil is like. He's very, very selfish, isn't he? He's a megalomaniac who loves war for the sake of it.

He attacks Israel for no other reason than to gain wealth and power to take the possessions of another land. He's arrogant. Verse 10, he makes these great statements about what he's going to do, doesn't he?

[2 : 3 4] May the gods do so to me and more also if the dust of Samaria won't suffice for handfuls for all the people who follow me. Now, that's a it's a kind of funny way of saying my army is so big and my power is so great that when I attack Samaria, I am going to reduce it to dust and there won't be enough dust left behind to fill all the hands of my army that is so great.

And he's so proud as well. There's this repeated phrase in the first section of the passage.

Ben-Hadad says, Ben-Hadad says, verse two, your silver and your gold are mine, he says to King Ahab.

Verse five, Ben-Hadad says, I'll lay my hands on whatever pleases you and I'll take it. He proudly throws his words around, doesn't he?

Sending out these great edicts of what he's going to do. And he's used to them being carried out and obeyed to the letter by his servants. People fear him and grovel before his evil.

He's a truly horrible character. But, you know, this evening, I don't want to make too much of Ben-Hadad. Because actually, his evil is not really made of much, actually.

[3 : 5 8] And really, that is what makes this king, Ben-Hadad, such a good example of what evil truly is. Or rather, what evil isn't.

Because essentially, this thing that we call evil in the world is nothing substantial in itself. Whilst his victims will have felt his power and feared his injustice.

Ben-Hadad, the king of evil, he is not made of much, really. There's one verse where we see that in full colour. He gets a report of Israel coming to attack his army.

And we see his true colours. We see Ben-Hadad's true substance. In verse 17 and 18, we're told that he's drinking with his other soldiers in one of his tents.

And he is drunk and he gives these strange orders in verse 18. He says about the approaching army, if they've come out for peace, take them alive.

[5 : 04] Or if they've come out for war, take them alive. Now, up until that point, we're thinking Ben-Hadad, he is so fearsome. He is so scary.

He's got all these kings with him. He's got this vast army. But then he gives strange orders like that. Actually, underneath it all, he's just a fruitcake.

He's utterly senseless. He is this inane drunk who sleeps in a tent. He's absurd. That's his personality.

There's an absence of truth in his camp and of substance. And that is why Ben-Hadad is a perfect representation of what we call evil in the world.

Because evil in itself isn't really a thing. And I'm not saying that evil doesn't exist. Of course, it does. But it's not something in its own right.

[6 : 04] Not as something that has any substance or any power in itself. All that evil is, is a negative rebellion against the true substance of God.

It's a misuse of power that God provides. Not a power that comes from itself. No, God is all-powerful, isn't he?

And all power, it comes from him. There is no evil power that kind of stands aside apart from God that has power in itself.

Evil merely takes what is God's and twists it and misuses it. Evil in itself is not made of anything. It has no substance.

It has no sense. Its existence is only always in a negative form. Militating against God in his positive order and holiness and substance.

[7 : 06] And so evil, just like Ben-Hadad, wanders senselessly on a kind of war path around the world, absurdly and irrationally. Evil is an enigma.

It's utterly stupid. And we see that in Ben-Hadad. And what makes him evil is not that he is anything in himself, but that he rebels and he misuses the power that has been lent to him by God.

And he sets himself up as a fake God, doesn't he? Do you remember that line? Ben-Hadad says, Ben-Hadad says. Well, do you see, actually, the passage, the narrator tells us that Ben-Hadad is stealing the kind of the Lord God's right and power to command and speak.

Did you notice the Lord uses a similar formula? Look at verse 13. Thus says the Lord. And then verse 14. Thus says the Lord.

You see, they both have words, don't they? But the question is, whose words have the true power? And whose words are just copycat words?

[8 : 20] He thinks he can defeat God. Did you notice Ben-Hadad's strategy with his army? For one of the battles in the passage, in verse 23, he speaks of Israel's gods, not knowing Yahweh.

He says their gods are gods of the hills. So they were stronger than us in the first battle. But let's fight against them in the plain, in the flatlands, and surely we'll be stronger than them there.

He thinks he can outsmart God. He can find a weakness in God. Find an area of battle that Yahweh isn't proficient in. So do you see, Ben-Hadad is a hack.

He's a copycat. Ben-Hadad is the evil king. And as you build this picture up of Ben-Hadad in the passage, you realise he is a picture of Satan, isn't he?

Who is a kind of king. Jesus calls him the ruler of this age. The ruler of this world. The prince of the power of the air.

[9 : 23] But he is the one who has no power unless it's first given to him by God. He is a created being who can only do what God permits.

He is a hack. We saw that a few months ago, didn't we, as we looked at Job chapter one. He has no power in himself. That is because all power anywhere is derived power.

God is the only one who is all powerful. So he has no substance really in himself. He is not a creator. He is merely a creature.

And he sends out these edicts, doesn't he? He speaks false things. And he challenges the word of God. Thus says the Lord. Well, do you remember what the devil says?

Did God really say? Ben-Hadad says. Ben-Hadad says. Satan says. You shall not surely die. But he's utterly senseless.

[10 : 26] And absurd. And irrational. He's like a drunkard in a tent. And yet, don't we feel his power? And his words do the damage.

And his evil is real, isn't it? And awful in the world. The king who is evil. But then we see the king who tolerates evil.

The second king. The king who tolerates evil. And this is where we get on to the Israelite king at the time. Ahab. King Ahab. Now, we've seen him before, haven't we?

It's been a while, I know. But he is the king of God's people. And he himself has done a lot of evil as well. You might remember back in chapter 16, we're introduced to him.

And the writer tells us that Ahab did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him. But I think there have been signs as we've looked at his story that he is not the epitome of evil like Ben-Hadad's.

[11:31] He is not as bad as he could be. I don't know if you can remember on Mount Carmel with Elijah and the prophets of Baal. After that, there seems to be a change in Ahab's mind.

Queen Jezebel seems to bring out the worst in him, doesn't she? But he is not as ruthless as she is, I don't think. And we'll see that next Sunday evening, hopefully. He's not the epitome of evil.

But, you know, the problem with Ahab is that he puts up with evil. He pampers it. He turns a blind eye to it.

He's a bit spineless in dealing with it properly in his kingdom. And we see that in this chapter. Right from the beginning, as soon as the evil king Ben-Hadad turns up and invades Israel, Ahab gives in to him, doesn't he?

In verse four. As you say, my lord, O king, I am yours and all that I have. And in the narrative, there are two big battles.

[12:37] And there are kind of two resume verses that sum up Ahab's dealings in the whole thing. One is in verse 34 and the other is in verse 42.

The Lord gives Ahab great victories, doesn't he? You get all these numbers of him killing off the enemy in great droves. And so the Lord allows Ahab to crush Ben-Hadad in battle to win two convincing victories.

But the problem is Ahab won't go the whole way. He won't remove Ben-Hadad for good. He won't stop the harm that Ben-Hadad is causing once and for all.

And actually, he makes a treaty with evil. Verse 34 is the first resume verse. Ahab made a covenant with him and let him go.

Ahab. And then verse 42, as if we're not sure about Ahab, the writer tells us again. Thus says the Lord, you have let go out of your hand the man I devoted to destruction.

[13:50] Devote to destruction. It's a common word in Hebrew. Harem. It means to finish him off, to get rid of him completely. To stop them from abusing people around them, to stop them altogether.

But Ahab couldn't do the Harem, could he? He couldn't stop Ben-Hadad for good. He couldn't finish him off. And it's so annoying because he defeats Ben-Hadad in the battle.

But he refuses to eradicate him in the war. He holds back from total victory. He has spared the evil that God means for him to destroy.

And it's massively disappointing. The evil king is left to continue his tyranny. And there are so many problems with this failure of Ahab's.

For starters, that wasn't Ahab's decision to make in the first place. And you'll see throughout Ahab's victory, it's made really, really obvious that Ahab is winning because the Lord gives him the victory, isn't it?

[15:02] The Lord provides strategic brilliance through prophets that he sends to him. He warns Ahab of a second battle in the springtime.

The Lord rouses himself and gives the armies of Ben-Hadad into Ahab's hand. We're told that twice, verse 13 and verse 28. So just as the battle belonged to the Lord, really.

So the enemy belonged to the Lord, really. Not to Ahab to do with what he wanted to do. The victory was God's.

And so the enemies were God's. Now, maybe we admire Ahab a bit for kind of showing some restraint. Being a moderate king, for being a kind of reasonable king, for showing leniency.

But, you know, Ahab had no right to interfere with the decision of the Lord to remove this evil king once and for all. And instead, Ahab pampered the Lord's enemy.

[16:17] He cuddled up to the Lord's enemy. He even calls him my brother in one verse. He pampers the Lord's enemy instead of purging him from the kingdom.

He's lenient when he should have been hard hitting. And that decision turns out to be disastrous for Ahab and for the whole nation of Israel.

Look at verse 42 again. Again, Ahab, because you've let him go like this, your life shall be for his life and your people for his people.

Do you see what's happened there? The whole of the people of Israel are affected and damaged by the king's toleration of evil. When he spares the enemy of God, he destroys the people of God.

Ahab calls Ben-Hadad his brother in verse 32. Maybe it's a political move. Maybe he wants him on side. And it's going to cost Ahab, isn't it, to get rid of evil once and for all in that case.

[17 : 29] But Ben-Hadad should have been expelled from the kingdom and never have been allowed to cause any more damage. And since he wasn't, the people are going to suffer.

Evil is left to reign. And later, actually, in the next couple of chapters, we see that the Syrians will strike again. And the people and Ahab will die in a tragic fulfillment of this.

So we've got the king who is evil and we've got the king who tolerates evil. So thirdly, we're led to the king who eradicates evil, who gets rid of it once and for all.

As we listen to this passage, we're crying out for a king who is not like Ahab. A king who is better than Ahab, aren't we? It's so disappointing.

It's like one of those movies where it's the kind of final battle, good versus evil. And the bad guy has been slain and he's been laid down and the credits come up and you're feeling really relieved.

[18 : 34] But just at the end of the credits, there's another bonus scene where the bad guy kind of rouses himself and gets up. And you think, I don't know, I've got to wait for the sequel to see what happens.

It's so disappointing. And that's how we're led to feel in this passage. We want another king to finish the job. And at the beginning, I said there were three kings in this passage.

Ben Hadad, Ahab and Jesus Christ. Now, Jesus isn't mentioned, is he? But the Lord is mentioned. God is mentioned.

But Jesus Christ isn't mentioned. So I wonder how you feel about bringing Jesus Christ into this scenario. Do we feel slightly uncomfortable in associating Jesus with the Lord of the Old Testament?

The Lord who devotes his enemies to destruction. Who eradicates and wants to eradicate the Ben Hadads from his kingdom. Is Jesus Christ really like that as well?

[19 : 43] Is the God of the Old Testament the same as the God of the New Testament? That often people think he's different, don't they? But actually, as you read the New Testament, that's not the picture at all that it gives of Jesus.

What you see in the New Testament is verse after verse describing the Lord of the Old Testament, who takes on flesh in the sun and comes to earth to bring about total victory over evil for his people. To come and utterly eradicate evil. To do what Ahab should have done in the first place. To do what Ahab should have done by stamping and killing out the serpent before he had a chance to speak. The Apostle John tells us that that is the reason why the Son of God appeared. 1 John chapter 3 verse 8. He appeared to destroy the works of the devil.

It's not often what we think about, is it? He comes as a warrior, Hebrews chapter 2, to break the power of him who holds the power of death.

[21 : 03] Do you remember Colossians chapter 2 verse 14? He comes by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. He comes by nailing the evil of God. He comes by nailing it to the cross.

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him. Lots of kind of war language, isn't there?

Lots of kind of destroying language of the evil one. Jesus comes to disarm evil by nailing the evil king's chief weapon to the cross.

Satan's chief weapon. He takes away Satan's weapon, Satan's power to accuse and harass his people by bringing before us the record of debt that we owe.

To use our sins as a weapon against us, to damn us. Christ removes that power from him at the cross. Jesus doesn't come to do a deal with Satan, does he?

[22 : 05] But to disarm Satan. He doesn't come to pamper Satan, but to purge him from his kingdom. He mortally wounds Satan at the cross.

And that defeat of evil is going to become an eradicated evil. That is the picture of Revelation, isn't it? Where Satan is finally thrown into a lake of fire forever and ever and ever.

And in the kingdom of God, in the new creation, in chapter 21, we're told that nothing unclean will ever enter there ever again. No more Ben Hadad.

Jesus comes to win a world of perfect peace and absolute rest for his people. Because he is going to remove all evil.

It's what it means in those last chapters of Revelation when it says that there will be no more sea. It doesn't mean there won't be any beaches or anything like that, but no more of the things that most threaten God's people.

[23 : 14] Those old things will pass away. And just think, it would have been so easy for Jesus to do what Ahab did, wouldn't it? To do a deal with Satan.

To let Satan go. He could avoid the terror of the cross. He could form a treaty with Satan and rule the world with him.

And that's what Satan wanted Jesus to do, isn't it? In the Garden of Gethsemane, he could have done a deal with Satan there. But even though it would cost Jesus everything, Jesus knew that if he spared the enemy of God, he would destroy the people of God.

Satan would be left to damn and to lie and to kill and to accuse his people. Now, is this all really true for today?

Maybe we wonder why there is still evil in the world, why it looks as if Satan is still at work. Why his words still have an effect, why his lies have an effect.

[24 : 23] Well, what we shouldn't think is that it's because Jesus hasn't fully finished him off, that Jesus has let him off like Ahab did.

That's not what's happened. It's just that there's a delay between the defeat of Satan and the eradication of evil. One writer tells the story.

He says, I was walking through the park and I passed a massive oak tree. And I looked at this oak tree and a vine had grown up around its trunk.

The vine started quite small and it didn't seem to be anything to bother about. But over the years, I noticed walking through the park that this vine had gotten taller and taller around the oak tree.

And as time passed, the lower half of the tree was covered by the vine's creepers. The mass of tiny feelers was so thick that eventually it was clear that the oak tree was in trouble.

[25 : 25] The life was being squeezed from it. But the gardeners in the park had seen the danger. And when the time was right, they took a saw and severed the trunk of the vine that was wrapping around the oak tree.

One neat cut across the middle. And the tangled mass of the vine still clung to the oak tree.

But the vine was dead. And it would gradually become plain as weeks passed and the creepers began to die and fall away from the tree.

Yes, the creepers of Satan still cling and have an effect, don't they? But Satan's power is severed at the trunk, at the root by Christ.

And gradually, his grip will dry up and fall away completely. John Davenant said that those who are vanquished are always more angry than powerful.

[26 : 34] And that is Satan, isn't it? His activity, he seems more angry than ever at the moment. His activity, though, is merely a sign of his defeat.

He lashes out as he falls away. Just as we close, in your Bible, here's a good Bible quiz question for you.

Do you know what the last word of the Old Testament is in the Hebrew? It is the word harem, to devote to destruction. Remember that, what Ahab should have done.

He should have harem'd Ben-Hadad from the kingdom. The last word of the Old Testament is the call for someone to come and remove all remaining evil, to devote it to destruction.

And the good news is, isn't it, that the Lord of the Old Testament takes on flesh when Jesus arrives, and that is who we get, somebody to harem all evil.

[27 : 38] And like Ahab, Jesus knew that it would cost him. But he refused to pamper the enemy of God.

Not my will, but yours be done. Ahab spared the enemy of God and destroyed the people. But Jesus defeats the enemy of God and saves the people.

And we look forward to the day, don't we, when defeated evil will become eradicated evil, and it will be removed altogether, forever and ever.
Let's pray together.