

# Divine Warnings and Hardened Hearts: Ahab's Missed Opportunities

## 1 Kings 20-21

<b>Key Bible Texts</b>	1 Kings 20-21
<b>Key Bible Verse(s)</b>	“And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord.” (1 Kings 20:28)

## Background to the Study

Judah, torn between good and evil kings, wavered between worshipping God and falling into idolatry. Israel, however, endured a succession of eight wicked kings. In response to their disobedience, God allowed foreign nations to rise against them. Over the next two centuries, Syria, Assyria, and Babylon emerged as their primary adversaries. At this point in 1 Kings, Syria, led by King Benhadad, was Israel's immediate threat. The nation was weakened by drought, making it vulnerable. Benhadad sought to secure Israel as his own, and his demands (1 Kings 20:3) suggest Israel was already somewhat under Syrian control. Scholars debate whether this Benhadad is the same one from 1 Kings 15, as three Syrian kings bore the name—most believe he was the second.

In the midst of this crisis, a prophet brought Ahab instructions from God. When Ahab obeyed, Israel triumphed over Syria. Encouraged by Elijah's dramatic showdown in 1 Kings 18, Ahab briefly followed God's guidance, securing victory twice. However, he soon succumbed to pride and greed, disregarding God's command by sparing Benhadad. Israel's soldiers had traditionally excelled in hill warfare but struggled in open plains, where chariots dominated. Yet Benhadad's army failed to realize that Israel's victories were due to divine intervention, not military strategy.

Meanwhile, Naboth refused to sell his ancestral land in obedience to God's law (Lev. 25:23; Num. 27:8-11), recognizing that Israel was merely a tenant of God's land. His refusal exposed the wickedness of Jezebel, who orchestrated his public execution using false testimony from “sons of Belial”—worthless men (Deut. 17:6; Lev. 24:16). Not only was Naboth unjustly killed, but his sons were also slain, ensuring his land would fall into Ahab's hands (2 Kings 9:26). This tragic injustice reflects how, at times, God permits evil to prevail, as seen in the persecution of innocent Christians today.

Then, God sent Elijah once more to proclaim judgment on Ahab and Jezebel. He foretold that dogs would lick up Ahab's blood—just as they had Naboth's (1 Kings 22:38)—and that Jezebel and her sons would meet their fate at the hands of Jehu (2 Kings 9–10). Ahab humbled himself upon hearing Elijah's prophecy, and as a result, God delayed judgment on his family, allowing him to die beforehand.

## TESTIMONIES FROM OUR DAY

*My two-year-old granddaughter is usually a cheerful, enthusiastic child. However, when things don't go her way, she sometimes becomes quite pouty. In those moments, the joke about watching out for her lower lip so she doesn't trip over it doesn't seem too far-fetched. At her age, this is not unusual, and with a loving, Christ-centered upbringing, she will outgrow this phase in due time.*

*Childish pouting, however, is far less amusing in an adult. King Ahab demonstrated this when he sulked in bed without supper, facing the wall—all because Naboth refused to sell him his vineyard. Ahab's pout set off a chain reaction: Jezebel devised a plot, which led to a staged false trial by local political leaders and, ultimately, the execution of an innocent man.*

*As Christians, we must recognize that pouting—and the selfishness that fuels it—has no place in our lives. If tempted to react in such a way, we should immediately pray for strength to resist it and refuse to give it any foothold. Pouting can create division between even the closest of friends and fellow believers, but even more dangerously, it can hinder us from hearing the still, small voice of our Saviour.*

*When life doesn't go as we expect, we must remind ourselves that God allows every circumstance for a reason. He has a plan to bring good out of every situation. Keeping this in mind will help us remain thankful, no matter what challenges arise.*

## A Closer Look

### Question 1

What did Benhadad pledge to Ahab when Ahab refused to give him Israel? (1 Kings 20:10,11) If Ahab had killed Benhadad, what do you think would have been the future of Israel? (1 Kings 20:42)

### Question 2

Despite his idolatry, Ahab wins battles against Ben-hadad because of God's intervention. Instead of following God's guidance, he spares Ben-hadad, ignoring divine instruction. Discuss how success can sometimes make people overconfident, causing them to ignore God's warnings. (1 Kings 20:34,42)

### Question 3

How can you make sure that your "defence" is secure? (1 Kings 20:22-25,42)

#### Question 4

Who was guilty in the mock trial and execution of Naboth? (I Kings 21:8-13, 16) Because Ahab humbled himself, God allowed him to die without seeing the judgment on his family. What does that indicate about God? (I Kings 21:17-19, 27-29)

#### Question 5

How do you think a Christian should respond if false accusations are made against him? (I Kings 21:3, 17-19; Matthew 5:11)

#### Question 6

Ahab, discontent with his wealth and power, desires Naboth's vineyard. Jezebel orchestrates Naboth's murder, leading to Ahab's harsh divine judgment. Explore how unchecked desires can blind us to God's commands and lead to serious consequences.

## Take Home

We serve an almighty, invincible, and eternal God. Someday those who deny His Word or His power will realize the truth about Him!

In the early part of the twentieth century, Victor Herbert wrote a humorous song containing the words: "Oh, I want what I want when I want it! That's all that makes life worth the while." As Christians, let us live just the opposite of this, with a new song that goes something like: "Lord, I want what You want when You want it . . ." This truly will bring us the happiness that the first song promises but fails to deliver.