

20.05 Ahab's War with Ben-hadad (1 Kings 20:1–43)

✓ “Check” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows
Brackets [. . .] indicate a remark to the teacher that should not be read aloud, or they show answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials.
- Ropes for head; sackcloth (burlap)

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *mercy*: not being punished when one deserves to be punished
- *to muster*: to assemble troops, especially for inspection or in preparation for battle

Scripture: (ESV)

1 Kings 20:1 Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his army together. Thirty-two kings were with him, and horses and chariots. And he went up and closed in on Samaria and fought against it. 2 And he sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel and said to him, “Thus says Ben-hadad: 3 ‘Your silver and your gold are mine; your best wives and children also are mine.’” 4 And the king of Israel answered, “As you say, my lord, O king, I am yours, and all that I have.” 5 The messengers came again and said, “Thus says Ben-hadad: ‘I sent to you, saying, Deliver to me your silver and your gold, your wives and your children. 6 Nevertheless I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time, and they shall search your house and the houses of your servants and lay hands on whatever pleases you and take it away.’”

7 Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land and said, “Mark, now, and see how this man is seeking trouble, for he sent to me for my wives and my children, and for my silver and my gold, and I did not refuse him.” 8 And all the elders and all the people said to him, “Do not listen or consent.” 9 So he said to the messengers of Ben-hadad, “Tell my lord the king, ‘All that you first demanded of your servant I will do, but this thing I cannot do.’” And the messengers departed and brought him word again. 10 Ben-hadad sent to him and said, “The gods do so to me and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people who follow me.” 11 And the king of Israel answered, “Tell him, ‘Let not him who straps on his armor boast himself as he who takes it off.’” 12 When Ben-hadad heard this message as he was drinking with the kings in the booths, he said to his men, “Take your positions.” And they took their positions against the city.

13 And behold, a prophet came near to Ahab king of Israel and said, “Thus says the Lord, Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will give it into your hand this day, and you shall know that I am the Lord.” 14 And Ahab said, “By whom?” He said, “Thus says the Lord, By the servants of the governors of the districts.” Then he said, “Who shall begin the battle?” He answered, “You.” 15 Then he mustered the servants of the governors of the districts, and they were 232. And after them he mustered all the people of Israel, seven thousand.

16 And they went out at noon, while Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the booths, he and the thirty-two kings who helped him. 17 The servants of the governors of the districts went out first. And Ben-hadad sent out scouts, and they reported to him, “Men are coming out from Samaria.” 18 He said, “If they have come out for peace, take them alive. Or if they have come out for war, take them alive.”

19 So these went out of the city, the servants of the governors of the districts and the army that followed them. 20 And each struck down his man. The Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them, but Ben-hadad king of Syria escaped on a horse with horsemen. 21 And the king of Israel went out and struck the horses and chariots, and struck the Syrians with a great blow.

22 Then the prophet came near to the king of Israel and said to him, “Come, strengthen yourself, and consider well what you have to do, for in the spring the king of Syria will come up against you.”

23 And the servants of the king of Syria said to him, “Their gods are gods of the hills, and so they were stronger than we. But let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. 24 And do this: remove the kings, each from his post, and put commanders in their places, 25 and muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot. Then we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.” And he listened to their voice and did so.

26 In the spring, Ben-hadad mustered the Syrians and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. 27 And the people of Israel were mustered and were provisioned and went against them. The people of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, but the Syrians filled the country. 28 And a man of God came near and said to the king of Israel, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is a god of the hills but he is not a god of the valleys, therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.’” 29 And they encamped opposite one another seven days. Then on the seventh day the battle was joined. And the people of Israel struck down of the Syrians 100,000 foot soldiers in one day. 30 And the rest fled into the city of Aphek, and the wall fell upon 27,000 men who were left.

Ben-hadad also fled and entered an inner chamber in the city. 31 And his servants said to him, “Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings. Let us put sackcloth around our waists and ropes on our heads and go out to the king of Israel. Perhaps he will spare your life.” 32 So they tied sackcloth around their waists and put ropes on their heads and went to the king of Israel and said, “Your servant Ben-hadad says, ‘Please, let me live.’” And he said, “Does he still live? He is my brother.” 33 Now the men were watching for a sign, and they quickly took it up from him and said, “Yes, your brother Ben-hadad.” Then he said, “Go and bring him.” Then Ben-hadad came out to him, and he caused him to come up into the chariot. 34 And Ben-hadad said to him, “The cities that my father took from your father I will restore, and you may establish bazaars for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria.” And Ahab said, “I will let you go on these terms.” So he made a covenant with him and let him go.

35 And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his fellow at the command of the Lord, “Strike me, please.” But the man refused to strike him. 36 Then he said to him, “Because you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, behold, as soon as you have gone from me, a lion shall strike you down.” And as soon as he had departed from him, a lion met him and struck him down. 37 Then he found another man and said, “Strike me, please.” And the man struck him—struck him and wounded him. 38 So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the way, disguising himself with a bandage over his eyes. 39 And as the king passed, he cried to the king and said, “Your servant went out into the midst of the battle, and behold, a soldier turned and brought a man to me and said, ‘Guard this man; if by any means he is missing, your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.’ 40 And as your servant was busy here and there, he was gone.” The king of Israel said to him, “So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it.” 41 Then he hurried to take the bandage away from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. 42 And he said to him, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall be for his life, and your people for his people.’” 43 And the king of Israel went to his house vexed and sullen and came to Samaria.

Introduction/Review:

On Mount Carmel Elijah had prayed, and God had sent both fire to burn the sacrifice and rain after three long years of no rain. All of Baal’s prophets were slain. This made wicked Queen Jezebel so angry that she threatened to slay Elijah within only one day. Elijah escaped, but he was discouraged. God sent a wind. Did God speak in the wind? [No.] God sent an earthquake. Did God speak in the earthquake? [No.] God sent a big fire. Did God speak in the big fire? [No.] How did God speak to Elijah? [In a still, small voice.] What three men did God tell Elijah to anoint? (Hazael to be the next king of Syria; Jehu to be the next king of Israel; and Elisha to be the prophet after Elijah.) What was Elisha doing when Elijah found him? [Plowing.] How did Elijah show Elisha to follow him? [Threw his coat/mantle on him.] What did Elisha do before he followed Elijah? [Killed the oxen for sacrifice and for meat and had a farewell feast.] Then Elisha went with

Elijah to help him and to learn from him.

Story:

The Bible doesn't tell us where Elijah and Elisha went, but some verses give us a hint. Just as Samuel had a school to train prophets, ✓it seems that Elijah and Elisha also had schools for the prophets. The Bible mentions one in Bethel and one in Jericho (2 Kings 2:3, 5). ✓Perhaps they went other places, teaching people and training prophets and working with those 7000 that God said served Him and not Baal.

Messengers from Ben-hadad

Ahab didn't bother them. He had bigger problems, for the king of Syria [locate on map] was threatening trouble—well, war—with Israel. Ben-hadad, thirty-two other kings, horses, and chariots had surrounded Ahab's city of Samaria and had started to fight against it.

"King Ahab, messengers are here from Ben-hadad," announced Ahab's servants.

"Send them in," replied Ahab. "Well? What do you have to say?"

"Thus says Ben-hadad," answered the messengers. "Your gold, your silver, your prettiest wives, and your children are mine."

Ahab answered, "Whatever you say, my lord. I am yours and whatever I have."

The messengers went away, but they came back with a worse message: "Tomorrow at about this time Ben-hadad's servants will come to search your house and the houses of the people in order to take whatever they want—gold, silver, wives, and children."

Hmmm! This was too much for Ahab to handle. He called the elders of the land for advice. All the elders said, "Don't let him do it." Ahab agreed and sent a messenger, saying he wouldn't let Ben-hadad's servant get what they wanted.

Ben-hadad sent another message, which basically said, "You are dead meat. We will do battle with you, and you will lose."

Ahab, getting a little braver, responded, "Don't boast when you put on your armor (before the battle) but rather when you take off your armor (after the battle)."

War with Ben-hadad

By the time Ben-hadad received this message, he and those thirty-two kings were drinking alcohol, but he ordered his men, "Get in position to fight!" His army got ready.

As usual, there were far more enemy soldiers than Israelite soldiers. ✓Perhaps Ahab was wishing he hadn't been so boastful himself. But God sent a prophet (we don't know his name) to Ahab. "This is what the Lord says," announced the prophet. "See all those soldiers? I will give them all into your hand today so that you may know that I am the Lord."

"Who will lead the battle?" asked Ahab.

"The Lord says by the servants of the governors."

Now, let's stop our story a minute so that I can tell you who these servants were. Do you suppose they were experienced soldiers? No, they were household servants, like Joseph had been in Egypt, and they probably knew very little about war. Nevertheless, these were the ones God chose. Does God need experienced soldiers in order to win a battle? Not if God is in charge.

These servants led, and the soldiers followed at noon—lunch time. Ben-hadad was drunk by now. He wasn't worried about the battle: his men would beat those Israelites.

Victory for Israel

What a surprise when the Israelites went out and scared those Syrians, including Ben-hadad, right back to Syria. Many Syrians died in battle, and Israel captured their horses and chariots.

God's prophet came again to Ahab. "You'd better prepare yourself because the Syrians will return in the springtime." Sure enough, Ben-hadad came back with a multitude of soldiers. The number of Israel's soldiers seemed so few, like two little flocks of goats compared to the Syrians, who seemed to fill the whole country.

The Syrian advisers had told King Ben-hadad, "The reason we lost that last battle is because Israel's gods are gods of the hills but not of the valleys. If we fight them on flat land, we will be stronger than they."

Would they be stronger?

Another man of God came with a message from God for Ahab. "Because the Syrians have said, 'The Lord is a god of the hills, but he is not a god of the valleys,' therefore, I will give all this great multitude into your hand so that you may know that I am the Lord."

Let's stop our story again for a minute. What kind of a king was Ahab? [Bad; evil; wicked.] Didn't he deserve punishment? [Yes.] What was God showing Ahab? [Mercy.] I wonder why God was helping this wicked king. What had both the prophet and this man of God said was the reason? ["So that you may know that the Lord is the true God."] What had been some of the other signs to Ahab to show him that the Lord is God? (1) Elijah's praying to stop the rain; (2) the fire from heaven; (3) the rain; (4) the victory in the previous battle; (5) now, the promise of victory. Ahab had experienced four major events and was about to experience a fifth to prove to him that the Lord is the true God. I would hope he would turn from Baal worship. But will he?

Back at the battlefield the Syrians camped on one side, seeming to fill the whole country, and the Israelites camped on the other side, seeming to be so very few. For six whole days they stayed in those positions. Finally, on the seventh day they fought, and Israel slew 100,000 Syrians in one day. That's like more than ten times the population of Lamar, Colorado. [Teacher, compare to the population of a town known by your students.] Those that didn't die ran into the town of Aphek [locate0, a Philistine city or possibly a town on the southeast side of the Sea of Galilee. There the city wall fell down and killed another 27,000 of them. That three times as many people as in Lamar.

King Ben-hadad had run to the city, too, but he was safe for a while. Surely, he would soon die at the hand of the Israelites.

Mercy from Ahab

"You know," said his servants, "we have heard that Israel's kings are merciful." What does merciful mean? [Not punishing those who deserve punishment.] They continued, "Let's dress in scratchy sackcloth and put ropes on our heads to look as if we are sorry, and let's go and ask Israel's King Ahab for mercy. Maybe he will spare our lives."

Now, Syria was Israel's enemy and God's enemy. Sometimes God does show mercy. He did when He saved me from my sin. Because I'm a sinner, I deserve to be punished forever, but God sent His Son to die for my sin and was merciful to me when He saved me. However, not everyone is given mercy. Many people die in their sins without being saved. Israel's kings were not always merciful to their enemies. God did not want Ben-hadad to live: Ben-hadad had compared the true God to false gods. In addition, God had already chosen the next king of Syria.

Ahab, however, showed mercy to Ben-hadad and let him live. God was not pleased. He sent a man ✓ who might have been a student prophet at one of Elijah's schools. This man disguised himself as a wounded soldier and told Ahab a story in which he pretended to let a soldier escape and would have to die for doing so.

Judgment on Ahab

Ahab said, “Yes, you should have to die for letting that soldier go.”

Then the prophet took off his disguise, and Ahab recognized him as one of the prophets. “Thus says the Lord,” announced the prophet. “Because you have let go a man whom I determined to slay, you shall lose your life, and your people also will die.”

That terrible judgment made Ahab grouchy and pouty as he went back home to Samaria.

It sounds as if God’s mercy towards Ahab was running out. Instead of repenting, Ahab felt sorry for himself. When God calls you to repent, what will you do? May God’s mercy be yours.

Lessons from This Lesson:

- We see Jesus:
Ahab’s wishy-washy mercy, trying to be a friend to everyone, is in complete contrast to God’s deliberate and elective mercy. Jesus died for those whom God elected to receive mercy, but those whom God does not choose to salvation are doomed to die in their sin.
- “Have we not heard that the God of Israel is a merciful God? Have we not found him so? Let us therefore rend our hearts and return to him” (Joel 2:13).

Activities:

- Play dough: soldiers; armor; wall
- Snack: Sandwiches of whatever variety the teacher chooses. (Sandwiches are what we used to serve for lunch. How does that connect with this story? Ben-hadad was in his tent at lunchtime.)
- Put on or feel sackcloth; put ropes on heads; call for mercy.
- Enact with plastic soldiers many Syrians running away to a city and having a wall fall on them.
- Review questions: (Game: Using Legos[®] or some other toy building blocks, build a small wall about two inches tall and six inches wide. For each correct answer, a student may add a block to the wall.)
 1. Although Ben-hadad threatened war, what did he and the thirty-two other kings with him seem more interested in doing? [Drinking.]
 2. Why did God say He would give the Syrian multitude into his hand? [To show that He is Lord.]
 3. Who would be the leaders in battle against Syria? [Household servants.]
 4. After Israel’s victory, about what did the prophet warn Ahab? What would happen again? [Syria would come again in the spring.]
 5. How did the Syrians explain away their defeat? What did they say about God? [“The Lord is a god of the hills, but he is not a god of the valleys.”]
 6. God said through the prophet that Israel would again defeat Syria. Why did God give this victory? [Because of Syria’s claim that God was not a god of the plains.]
 7. After Israel struck down 100,000 foot soldiers in battle, what happened when Syrian soldiers fled to the city? [27,000 soldiers died when a wall fell on them.]
 8. What foolish thing did Ahab do to Ben-hadad? [Showed mercy and let him live.]

Memory Verse[s]:

- Psalm 121
1 I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? 2 My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
3 He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. 4 Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand. 6 The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. 8 The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

Handwork:

- Color the line drawing found at the end of this lesson of the prophet's rebuking Ahab, or download it at [King Ahab's Life | Bible Fun For Kids](#).

mercy

to muster

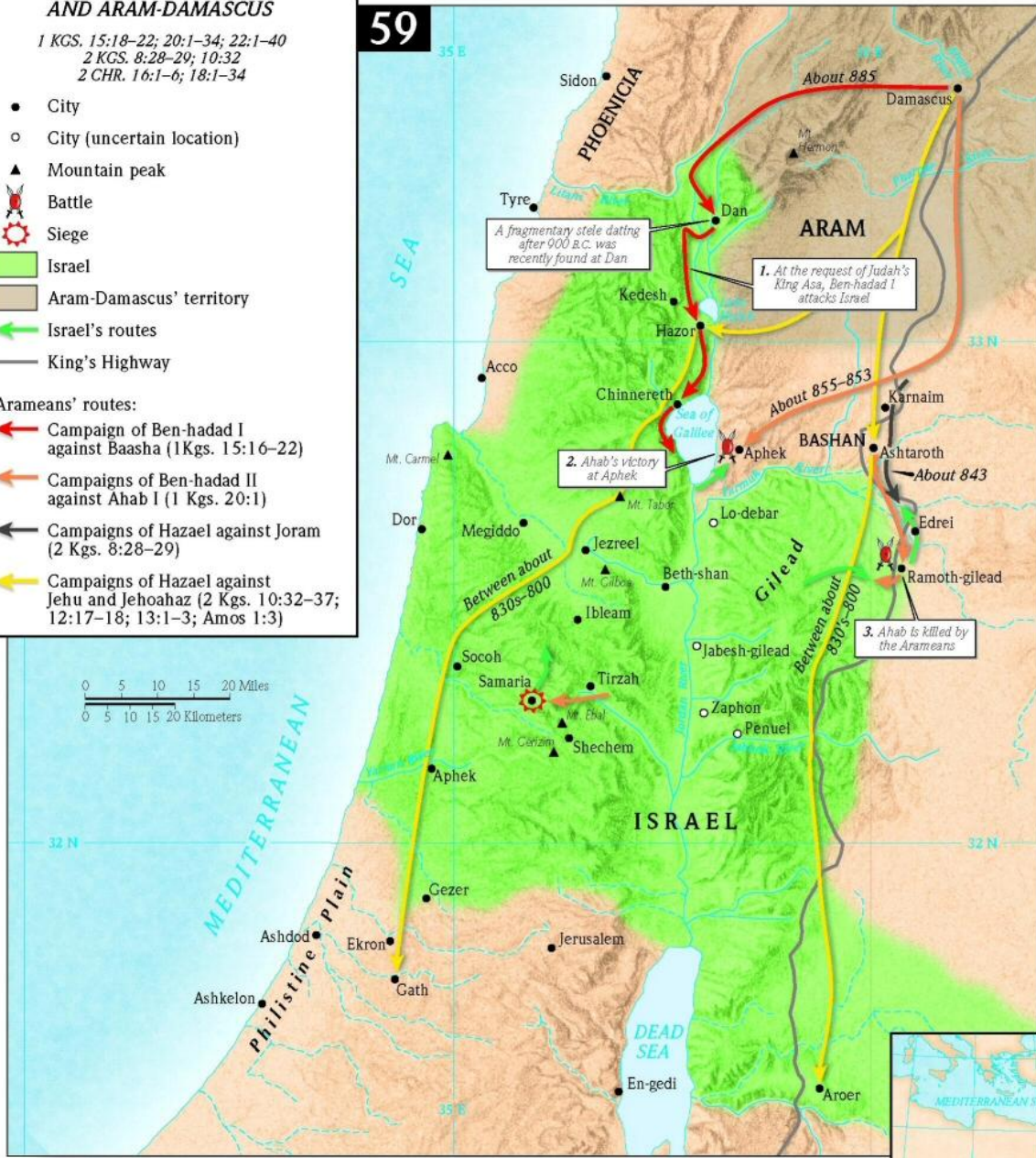
CONFLICTS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ARAM-DAMASCUS

1 KGS. 15:18-22; 20:1-34; 22:1-40
 2 KGS. 8:28-29; 10:32
 2 CHR. 16:1-6; 18:1-34

- City
- City (uncertain location)
- ▲ Mountain peak
- ⚔ Battle
- ⚔ Siege
- Israel
- Aram-Damascus' territory
- Israel's routes
- King's Highway

Arameans' routes:

- Campaign of Ben-hadad I against Baasha (1 Kgs. 15:16-22)
- Campaigns of Ben-hadad II against Ahab I (1 Kgs. 20:1)
- Campaigns of Hazael against Joram (2 Kgs. 8:28-29)
- Campaigns of Hazael against Jehu and Jehoahaz (2 Kgs. 10:32-37; 12:17-18; 13:1-3; Amos 1:3)



[Ben-Hadad Invading Israel - Bing images](#)

First Kings

20

Ahab and

Syria







[King Ben Hadad of Aram - Bing images](#)

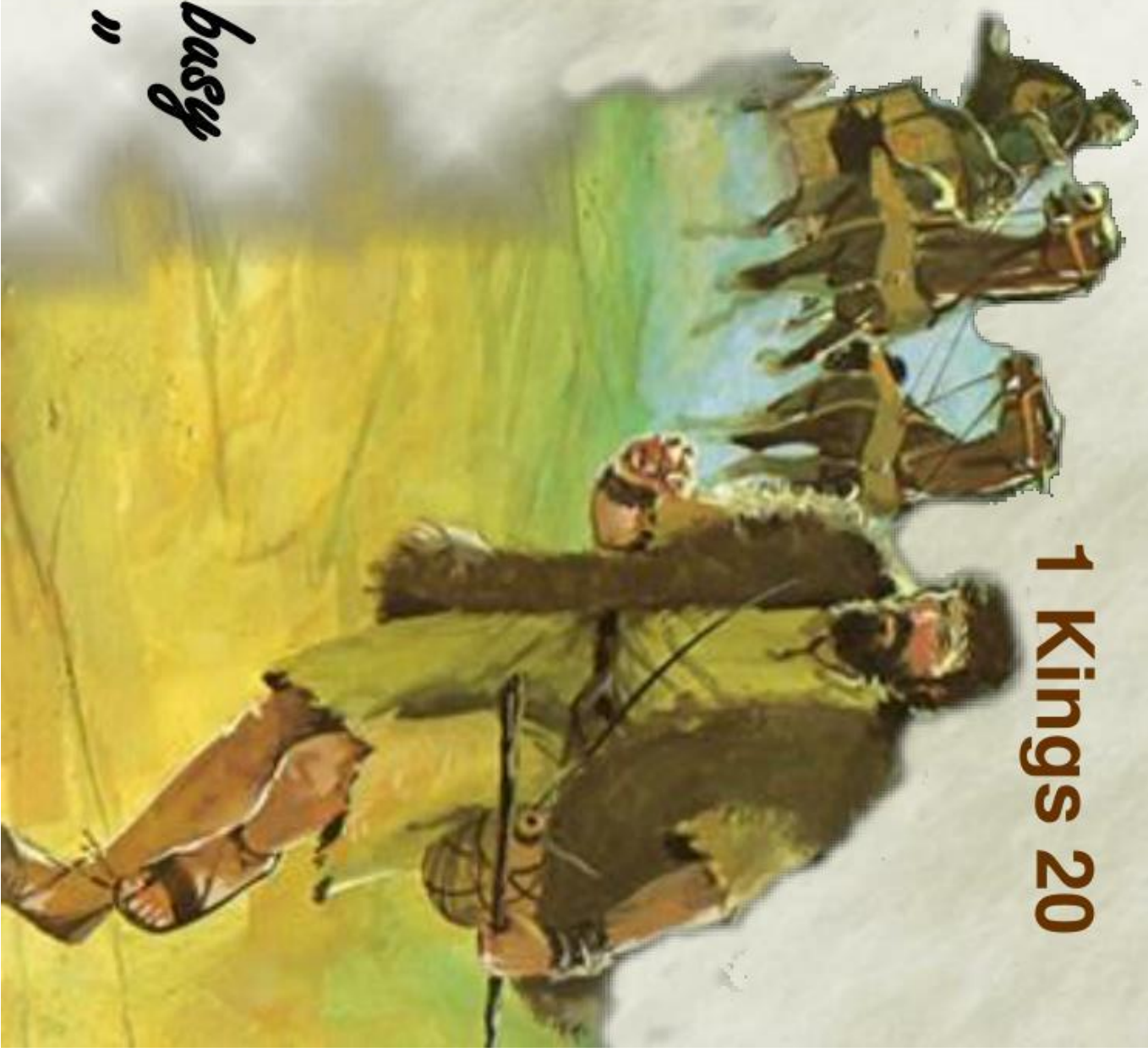






“Guard This Man”

1 Kings 20



*“But I was too busy
here and there”*

