

GLEANINGS — September 20, A.D. 2015
Which King Are You?

In 1 Kings 20, the Holy Spirit gives us a narrative account not easily understood. The context is the warfare between Ahab, king of Israel, and the Syrians. God Who is full of mercy and Whose goodness leads to repentance (Romans 2:4) promises victory to wicked Ahab but appoints Ben-Hadad king of Syria to utter destruction.

But like Saul who wrongly spared Agag (1 Samuel 15), Ahab wrongly spares Ben-Hadad! God responds by giving a very strange assignment to one of his servants: "Now a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his neighbor by the word of the LORD, 'Strike me, please.' And the man refused to strike him. Then he said to him, 'Because you have not obeyed the voice of the LORD, surely, as soon as you depart from me, a lion shall kill you.' And as soon as he left him, a lion found him and killed him." (1 Kings 20:35,36)

(Long before Ahab's time, Abraham had determined he would obey a very strange command of God: to slay his son Isaac as a sacrifice. God, pleased with Abraham's faith-born obedience to that incomprehensible command, gave Isaac back to his dad as if risen from the dead, per Hebrews 11:19. But his man who disobeyed a very strange command of God was sent down among the dead. Our God is not One to be trifled with!)

As we read on in 1 Kings 20, we find that the prophet, "...found another man, and said, 'Strike me, please.' So the man struck him, inflicting a wound. Then the prophet disguises himself with a bandage and meets King Ahab with these words, "Your servant went out into the midst of the battle; and there, a man came over 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.' While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone."

Ahab replies to the prophet with these words. "So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it." The prophet removes his bandage, and King Ahab recognizes him. The prophet then proclaims the word of the LORD to Ahab, regarding his sparing of Ben-Hadad: "Because you have let slip out of your hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people."

Ahab's response? **"So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and displeased,** and came to Samaria." (1 Kings 20:43)

Let's compare King Ahab's response to a direct, powerful, prophetic searching out of his sin to a similar encounter between King David and a prophet. After David's sin of killing Uriah with the sword of the people of Ammon and taking Uriah's wife, the prophet Nathan comes to David with a parable about a rich man with many sheep who took the one cherished lamb of a poor man and prepared it as a meal.

Just as Ahab spoke against himself a good judgment about the fictional guardian of a prisoner of war, so David – in hot anger – spoke against himself a good judgment about the rich lamb slayer of Nathan's parable, upon which Nathan utters to David those direct, powerful, prophetic words **"You are the man!"** thus exposing David's heinous sin (see 2 Samuel 12).

According to Psalm 51, David's response was prompt and sincere repentance. He cried for forgiveness, a cleansed heart, a renewed and steadfast spirit, and for the restoration of the joy of his salvation. According to 1 Kings 20, King Ahab (*who is likely the namesake of Herman Melville's dark and morose character, the sea captain in the novel Moby Dick*) responded by sulking with no repentance.

How will you and I respond when God's powerful word, living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, powerfully and directly searches out our secret sin? Will we be sullen and displeased, or tender hearted and prompt to repent?