

JUNE 19

1 Kings 20-21

You might have heard people say that there is no love and grace in the OT, just hardness and law. That shows that they have not really read the OT. Particularly today, you have to ask yourself, "Why did God include these stories?" It seems they are included to show His love and grace. And the kicker is, He is showing love and grace to people who didn't deserve it or respond to it. That is REALLY love and grace when you show it to evil people. Doesn't that sound like what Jesus says in Luke 6:35, *But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.*

1 Kings 20

Vs. 1-6 Apparently Ahab had promised to obey these demands. He should have sent Jezebel along with the messenger. Apparently Ben-hadad was near at hand and when he heard that Ahab complied so easily, he wanted more.

Vs. 7-12 So when Ahab decided to fight, Ben-hadad was near the city getting drunk.

Vs. 13-15 Notice that this is God encouraging and saving Ahab, the utterly bad guy. God went out of His way. Ahab didn't seek God. God just volunteered His help. Then, after God promised victory, He guided Ahab by answering his questions. Who says God isn't full of grace?

Vs. 16-21 So, God gave Ahab the victory. Apparently this was a big battle and a big win. The question is whether Ahab would internalize this and respond in devotion to God. God's help may have been for many purposes, but when God's help and kindness is not responded to, it becomes a basis of judgment.

Vs. 22-30 Then God not only warned Ahab about the coming battle, but this victory was because of God. This was an enormous victory and should have been the cause for a lot of praise and gratitude. In v. 30 God even brought the city walls down on 27,000 men. You would think that everyone would have turned to Him.

Vs. 31-34 This is a flashback to King Saul saving the king of the Amalekites. Apparently, Ahab was told to kill this king, but Ahab chose to use his political savvy rather than obey God and eliminate the problem.

Vs. 35-43 This prophet was known to Ahab and apparently it was necessary for him to be both wounded and disguised so that he could get near to the king. This "parable" seems reminiscent of Nathan telling David about the poor man and the sheep and getting David to condemn himself.

Vs. 41-43 Notice that Ahab, given a victory by God, didn't obey God. Getting God's blessing was great, but not to obey afterward showed that Ahab deserved God's punishment. What God said through the prophet was true: Ahab was to have killed this king, but Ahab chose to save himself by making a treaty with Syria rather than by obeying God.

Notice that Ahab was *vexed and sullen*. Apparently he was like that a lot.

1 Kings 21

Vs. 1-6 This land was part of Naboth's family, and under the law Naboth couldn't sell it. It had to remain in his family.

Vs. 5-16 What a woman. Later we'll see that Naboth's entire family, wife and kids, were also killed with him. No heirs were left.

Vs. 17-26 Ahab and Jezebel deserved this judgment on so many counts, but with the murder of Naboth, they had crossed the point of no return. Notice the degrees of this curse on Ahab and Jezebel. Both Jeroboam and Baasha received something similar to this, but this was very specific

to their crimes. The dogs would lick Ahab's blood where they had licked Naboth's blood (actually God will add deep irony to this) and as Jezebel used "dogs" to kill Naboth, she will be consumed by dogs.

Vs. 27-29 And still, the Lord will show mercy, even if the vilest respond in repentance. That sounds like love and grace to me. We'll see again, that this wasn't true repentance; it was just for a minute. Ahab's next move will be to openly ignore God and he will punish a prophet. And he'll get what he deserved.

The purpose of these events showed all the people and nations that God could be sought by anyone. Regardless of what a person had done, if they repented, God would forgive and show grace and mercy. Again, anyone who says that God didn't show grace and love, and offer forgiveness, in the Old Testament, hasn't read it.

Acts 12:24-13:15

Acts 12:24-25

Significant here is not only the growth of the church, but John Mark, Barnabas' cousin, enters as a disciple and a missionary. The prayer meeting for Peter had been at the house of John Mark's parents, a well-to-do family. It is thought that the last supper and the meeting where the Spirit came at Pentecost were also at this house. John Mark is the writer of the Gospel of Mark, and he is the disciple wrapped only with a sheet, who, on the night Jesus was arrested, was grabbed, slipped out of the sheet and "streaked" home.

Acts 13:1-15

Vs. 1-3 Notice that the church in Antioch of Syria was very organized, very international and very independent of Jerusalem. Since they weren't under any distress, the leaders were praying and fasting for other reasons, probably because of the harvest. Notice again, how "talky" the Spirit is. He is not an impersonal force.

Vs. 4-12 This is the beginning of the first missionary journey by Paul. There will be three recorded in Acts.

V. 5 It is interesting that Paul, like Jesus, went first to the synagogues, found those who easily and naturally responded to the gospel, and then began reaching the Gentile population.

Notice that up to v. 9, Barnabas is always named first. After v. 9 Paul will always be seen as the leader. Barnabas was willing to step back. This shows how the Spirit was on both Paul and Barnabas.

Notice too, that as of v. 9 Saul will use his Greek name, Paul, for the rest of his career. Paul, the former Pharisee and true-blue Jew, was committed to reaching the Gentiles for Christ, becoming all things to all men for the sake of the gospel and the harvest.

V. 12 Although the governor was impressed that the Holy Spirit had power over the magician, it says that he was astonished at what Paul taught. This indicates true faith that was based on the teaching, not on the miracle.

Vs. 13-15 Note that John Mark deserted them here and went home to Jerusalem. It is fair to call what Mark did, desertion, since Paul will insinuate in chapter 15 that it showed weakness and a lack of commitment. When we get to heaven we'll have to ask Mark why he left. Here are some thoughts you can add to your own.

Mark knew the Saul that had hurt people. As Paul began to take the lead, he might have sounded like the old guy every now and then. Also, Mark was a true-blue Jew too, and he was a city boy who lived well. This adventure might have started to look like camp Gitchy-Goomy, and he wasn't used to pork chops or those who ate them. He might have been having a cultural crisis that overwhelmed him and he ran home. It is to be noted that Barnabas will not only pursue Mark and pick him up, but he will go nose to nose with Paul to show his trust and belief in John Mark. As a result, this failed servant will be restored to service and will write the first of all the Gospels about the suffering servant who fulfilled His mission. Mark will eventually travel with Peter after traveling later with Barnabas. Paul, just before he dies, will speak highly of Mark and request his presence.

V. 15 Isn't it interesting how the Spirit just set up this situation? It really is more about the Spirit, than about Paul and Barnabas. It would be hard to publish a book on missionary strategy or church planting strategy as our own ideas, when the main concept is watching what the Spirit is doing and following Him. This is another way of viewing what it means to abide in Christ, following Him in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 137

This psalm is obviously written by one of the exiles from Jerusalem who was there when the city was finally destroyed. Jerusalem and the temple had been judged by God because of Judah's continued rebellion and disobedience. It was brutal when it happened, but God had promised this would happen. And, it was a just judgment.

Vs. 1-6 Now in exile, how could they sing? And worse, how could they forget what happened to Jerusalem? Three things are mentioned that were painful to them. They were taunted as they sang songs to Zion. They deserved to be taunted, since they really hadn't been worshiping God.

V. 7 Second, the Edomites had been very brutal to them. According to Obadiah, God would judge them.

Vs. 8-9 Third, they remembered the cruelty of the Babylonians.

It was on the basis of psalms like this one, that C.S. Lewis didn't think the entire Bible was inspired. How could God inspire or express something like v. 9? If you lose the graphic image, what you really have is, "blessed will be he who does to you what you have done to us."

As we have just read about God's judgment on Jeroboam and on Baasha, God Himself judged their evil with the evil of others. Soon we will see God use a demon to lure Ahab to his own death and judgment. This is totally just in that Ahab preferred to listen to lies, rather than God, and he served demons, rather than God. Jerusalem, as we'll see in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, was totally sick, diseased and infested with evil and idolatry. They deserved it.

When Babylon sacked Jerusalem the final time under Zedekiah, as the Babylonian soldiers went through the city, rather than stabbing children with their swords, they would grab a child by the arm and swing it against the corner of a building, or a rock wall, smashing its head and killing it. God and the psalmist are saying that the Babylonians will be judged with the same kind of cruelty that they dished out.

Proverbs 17:16

In English this comes across like a play on the words, *money* and *sense* (cents), like, "How can a fool *buy wisdom* with money *when he has no sense*?"