

Who was Ben-Hadad in the Bible?

Ben-Hadad seems to have been the title of the reigning king of Aram (Syria). Ben-Hadad means “son of Hadad.” Hadad or Adad was the god of storm and thunder, and, as was common in that epoch of history, kings were seen as sons of the primary god of the region.

In the Bible, Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, is mentioned in 1 Kings 15:18-22; throughout 1 Kings 20; 2 Kings 6:24; 8:9; 13:24-25; 2 Chronicles 16:2-4; Jeremiah 49:27; and Amos 1:4. Since Ben-Hadad is a title much like Pharaoh or President, the term can refer to different individuals at different times. The context of each passage must be studied to determine just who is involved. Most students of history accept the existence of three Ben-Hadads who ruled in Damascus: Ben-Hadad I, who ruled c. 900-860 BC; his son (or grandson) Ben-Hadad II, who ruled 860-841; and another, unrelated Ben-Hadad, the son of the man who assassinated Ben-Hadad II.

In 1 Kings 15:18, Ben-Hadad is designated as the son of Tabrimmon, the son of Hezion. In this passage, King Asa of Judah makes a treaty with Ben-Hadad to help protect himself against the king of Israel, who was threatening Judah. (This is also recorded in 2 Chronicles 16:2-4.) Ben-Hadad sent soldiers against Israel and King Baasha and conquered a number of towns, bringing some relief to Judah.

In 1 Kings 20, Ben-Hadad once again attacks the northern kingdom of Israel, where Ahab is now the king. It is possible that this is the same Ben-Hadad who attacked in 1 Kings 15, or it could be a son, Ben-Hadad II. It seems that this time Ben-Hadad is attacking on his own without consideration for any treaty with Judah. And this time, although he had 32 kings helping him (1 Kings 20:1), he is defeated by King Ahab and the army of Israel. About three years later, Israel and Syria renew their conflict, leading to

Ahab's final battle and death (1 Kings 22).

In 2 Kings 6-7, about nine years after Ahab's death, Ben-Hadad II invades Israel and lays siege to Samaria, the capital. The siege went on for so long that the people in the city were starving to death. However, in the middle of the night, the Lord caused the Aramean army to hear sounds of an advancing army. Thinking the king of Israel was receiving help from foreign nations, all of Ben-Hadad's men fled, leaving everything behind.

In 2 Kings 8, the prophet Elisha travels to Damascus and relays a paradoxical prophecy to Ben-Hadad II, who was ill: "Go and say to him, 'You will certainly recover.' Nevertheless, the Lord has revealed to me that he will in fact die" (verse 10). Just as Elisha said, Ben-Hadad began to recover from his illness, but then a man named Hazael murdered Ben-Hadad and took the throne of Aram. In 2 Kings 13, Hazael is succeeded by his son, who is also named Ben-Hadad. This final Ben-Hadad was defeated three times by King Jehoash of Israel, fulfilling another prophecy of Elisha (2 Kings 13:1-25).

In Jeremiah 49:27, the word of the Lord says, "I will set fire to the walls of Damascus; it will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad." At the time of Jeremiah's prophecy, none of the Ben-Hadads mentioned above would have been alive. The reference may be to the current king of Aram or perhaps to a fortress that had been built by and now bore the name of a former king. In Amos 1:4 we have a similar prophecy: "I will send fire on the house of Hazael that will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad." By this time, the original Ben-Hadad had been killed, and Hazael was king. As above, "the fortress of Ben-Hadad" could simply refer to a fortress of the current king or to a specific fortress that was known by that name.

In summary, Ben-Hadad is the title of the Aramean king, “son of Hadad,” a prominent deity in the region. Several kings of Aram had extensive interaction with the kingdom of Israel and attacked several times. The Lord used Ben-Hadad and the Arameans to bring judgment on rebellious Israel, but He punished Aram for her evil, as well.