

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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A TIME OF DELIVERANCE

by Gary North

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 the God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD. And they pitched one over against the other seven days, And so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day (I Kings 20:28-29).

Let us not forget who the king of Israel was when this happened. It was Ahab. He and his wife Jezebel were probably the worst pair of rulers ever to sit on the throne of Israel. In the previous chapter, we read of their persecution of Elijah after Elijah's defeat of the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel. In the next chapter, Ahab hired perjurers to testify against Naboth, had him executed, and stole his vineyard. But in between, God gave Ahab a stunning victory over a huge army.

A hundred thousand fatalities in one day is a huge number. That is almost twice the number of American deaths in Vietnam for a decade. Modern battles seldom produce such losses. What we are forced to conclude is that God granted to this perverse Israelite worshipper of Baal one of the most remarkable military victories of the ancient world. Why?

The reason is clear: the Syrians had grown arrogant. They had been beaten once by 7,000 young Israelite soldiers the previous year (I Ki. 20:15-21). Now they had returned in full force, to avenge their losses. They had an explanation for their previous defeat: the local power of the God of the Bible. Like some regional deity of some obscure ancient city, the God of the Bible was regarded by the Syrians as a limited being with limited power. "And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they" (v. 23). Few kings have ever had worse counsel than Benhadad received that day.

Names and Mountains

The people of the plain in the land of Shinar wanted to make themselves a name (Gen. 11:4). They wanted to define their own existence and name themselves as autonomous people. They would do so, they believed, by making themselves a tower stretching up to heaven. In short, they would construct a holy mountain. This is the theological meaning of pyramids, ziggurats, and similar man-made mountains: an assertion of autonomy.

Eden was a mountain, for "a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and

became four heads" (Gen. 2:10). Water flows downward, and the four rivers flowed outward from the garden, presumably in all directions. Sinai was a mountain, and God called out of the bush to Moses. Carmel was a mountain, and Elijah confronted the false prophets on top of Carmel. The link between the mountain and the garden, and the link between the mountain and the voice of God, are familiar themes in the Bible.

Thus, when the Syrians accused God of being a God of the hills, they were once again asserting the theology of Satan. Yes, there is a God. Yes, He dwells on a mountain or in the hills. Yes, He has demonstrated His authority and power from his stronghold in the hills. But He is limited. Man is His match—indeed, His master—in the valleys. The God of the Bible, being local, can be defeated whenever the assembled kings of mankind gather together and lure God's people into the valley.

The result was the initial loss of a hundred thousand men. But that was not the end of it. The survivors fled to Aphek and entered the city. There a wall fell on 27,000 more of them. They suffered the same end as Jericho did. Men trust in walls when they lose in the plains. They build themselves towers, as if towers were mountains. They seek the high ground, and they perish. They put their faith in chariots, tactics, and walls.

What they really trust is their own power to name themselves. They believe that they can prosper apart from God, and in defiance of God. When he defeats them, they try again. They seek some other explanation for their defeat. They come back in full force, chariot for chariot, and expect to win. They do not learn from experience. The search for autonomy always produces disaster, and yet rebellious men refuse to give up the search.

A Covenant Between "Brothers"

Ahab was a king. Benhadad was also a king, although a defeated king. Ahab referred to him as "my brother" (I Ki. 20:32). Indeed, he was his brother, spiritually. Ahab refused to execute Benhadad when the latter had been delivered into his hand. For this, a prophet informed him, "thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people" (v. 43). We think of all the evils that Ahab committed, but it was this one—leniency to a groveling pagan king—which brought forth the wrath of God against Ahab. It was the same sin which brought low Saul's kingship: his failure to slay Agag, king of the Amalekites (I Sam. 15). Not for all the other sins he committed, but for this one—the sin of leniency to the declared enemy of God who had been marked by God for total destruction—Saul lost his kingdom (I Sam. 15:28).

Neither Ahab nor Saul understood that God had not delivered their enemies into their hands for the sake of

spoils. It was not the sheep of Amalek nor the captured cities of Israel that would be returned by the Syrians that God wanted. But Ahab could not resist the lure of his own name: "Then Benhadad said unto him, The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will restore: and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away" (v. 34).

In effect, Benhadad was offering to name streets for Ahab in Damascus. There might be a "Ahab Street" or even an "Ahab Blvd." In Damascus. He hoped that his memory would live immortally in a pagan city. His name would persevere. For this, Ahab gladly cut a covenant with his brother, King Benhadad, who earlier in the day had waged war against Ahab and who would have slain him enthusiastically.

God had brought the victory to Ahab on two occasions, not in order to immortalize Ahab's name, but to defend His own name. It was the Syrians' accusation of His own impotence on the plains that had brought God to Ahab's side. No matter how much of an ethical rebel Ahab was, and would continue to be, God was willing to elevate him. The Syrians had chosen to attack His people in order to demonstrate His weakness before the world. Ahab's sins were small potatoes compared to this horrendous crime.

A Stay of Execution

The prophets came before the kings of Israel and Judah again and again to warn them of the coming wrath of God. There were many kings who took no heed, and yet who reigned in safety. God delayed His judgments. Isaiah came before the people of Judah in the eighth century B.C.; the Babylonians did not carry them off for over a century and a half. God grants societies stays of execution. He granted a delay to Egypt; he also granted four generations to the Canaanites, until their cup of iniquity was full (Gen. 15:16). He would have granted Sodom a stay of execution for the sake of only ten righteous families (Gen. 18:32).

The Assyrians carried off the Israelites; the Babylonians carried off the residents of Judah. The Romans sent the Jews out of the land in the second century, A.D. Eventually, the judgment comes, unless men repent and remain in a state of humility before God. But God delays His judgments for His own purposes. The most important purpose is the integrity of His own name.

The Sovereignty of God

The sovereignty of God is not a popular doctrine. Even those Christians who use the terminology generally begin to backtrack when they face the doctrine in its biblical form, namely, the doctrine of predestination. They do not want to grant to God all power over heaven and earth if, by such acknowledgement, they are then called upon to deny the autonomy of man's will (which they are called upon to do).

The question then arises: **What is the name of God?** By name, I mean **His defining characteristics**. What do we say that God is? A God of the hills only? A God of the hills and plains, but not the walled city? A God of power, but limited power? A God of knowledge, but limited knowledge? Or is He the God who hated Esau before Esau was even born, or had done evil (Rom. 9:11)? Is He the God who raised up Pharaoh in order to demonstrate His power over Him before all the world (Rom. 9:17)? What kind of God do we call upon in times of emergency?

On the other hand, what kind of God do the enemies of God say He is? When the Marxists repeat that there is no God, that God is a figment of men's imaginations, that God is an idea created by the ruling class to suppress the ambitions and needs of the oppressed proletariat, are they not saying that God is not even a God of the hills? Have they not

stuck their fists in God's face? Isn't the Marxists' attack on the churches really an act of defiance comparable to Syria's invasions of Israel in Ahab's day?

Ahab did not call upon God to deliver him. He capitulated to Benhadad's terms of surrender, and then he called in the elders of Israel to complain about the cruel terms he had already agreed to (20:6-7). Yet God delivered him from Benhadad. It was not a question of Ahab's conversion to God. He made no such covenant. What God did was solely to defend His own integrity.

World War III

The Soviet Union has won World War III from the standpoint of chariots. There can be no doubt about the numbers. We are not being told by our leaders just how far behind we are. A detailed study is now available which tells only the barest outline of the story, but it is sufficient. You can and should order your free copy, **Can America Catch Up?**

Committee on the Present Danger
905 Sixteenth St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Here is the problem. The growth of Soviet power is relentless. The retreat of the West seems equally relentless. This is what Solzhenitsyn has been saying for over a decade. The nation is on auto-pilot, and our leaders are in the back of the plane, celebrating. It's party time. The passengers are anesthetized.

What I am saying is this: the sleepwalking cannot go on forever. The Soviets are not building up this historically unprecedented arsenal for the fun of it. They intend to use their power in what may prove to be the most effective **bloodless blackmail** attempt in the history of the world.

Unless there is a miracle—a miracle based on something other than military production—we are going to see the tragic events played out in our day, probably in the 1990's. We are in a sleepwalker's paradise. It cannot last. Now, I really do believe in miracles. I've written my reasons for believing that the Soviet Empire will begin to unravel by the year 2000. ("The Sabbath Millennium," *Biblical Economics Today*, Feb./March 1985.) David Chilton's book, **Paradise Restored**, offers similar reasons (Reconstruction Press, Box 7999, Tyler, TX 75711: \$15.95). Understand, these are distinctly religious reasons. I don't think the counting of chariots is the heart of the matter. But the Soviets do. And so, I suspect, do our nation's foreign policy leaders. That's why push will come to shove.

What I am concerned about is the next 15 years. I think we are going to be faced with an offensive by the Soviets that will change the course of history—an offensive that must call forth a serious and essentially non-military response from the citizens of the United States. The war cannot be won militarily.

It is time, then, to begin praying for revival, reconstruction, and restoration. It is time to proclaim the sovereignty of God, even if our leaders are as theologically blind as Ahab was (and most of them are). God will spare the nation for the sake of the righteous, in the face of an enemy which proclaims not just the regional impotence of God, but the very non-existence of God. Soviet rulers may continue to suffer from exceedingly high life insurance rates. They will not achieve their goals without the authorization of the God they claim does not exist. But we should pray that God does not grant them this authorization.

If he brings them low, we must also remember the peace-making blunders of Saul and Ahab: the covenant between "brothers." That, too, seems to be on the drawing boards of today's humanist elite rulers in the West (the New World Order). That, too, is still a great evil. That, once again, will bring the judgment of God on those who make such covenants.

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