

13. A victory that was lost due to a lack of will

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Between August 5th, 1964 and March 28th, 1973 America lost 58,156 men and women's lives in a little country called Viet Nam in Southeast Asia. It was a despised war by many people at home, especially by young people who mindlessly followed Hollywood liberals. They would accept 'Utopia' concept which was nothing more than nicely packaged Socialism and Communism. They and the liberal media influenced the politicians in Washington so much that the war policies swayed from one end to another each week – much like the present day.

82% of the Viet Nam veterans who were involved in heavy combat strongly believe the war was lost because of a lack of political will to win. I strongly believe that the U.S. politicians were far more concerned about their re-election campaigns than the lives of the American soldiers and the war they were fighting.

In the meanwhile, the South Korean military also participated in this war as an ally of the American forces. Their politicians were completely behind their troops. They sent their sons to war with comments like this: "If you cannot win, don't come back."

Three divisions of Korean forces did not have to exaggerate their high enemy body counts for the computers in the Pentagon like many American generals did. Even the captured Viet Cong documents showed the respect they were treated with, stipulating contact with the Korean forces is to be avoided at all costs unless a victory is 100 % certain.

I am not saying this to tell you that Korean soldiers were better than Americans. The American forces proved itself to be the best in the world during the Operation Desert Storm because the politicians had a will to win and they allowed the soldiers to win.

Tonight we find king Ahab of Israel was handed two decisive victories over Syria by the power of God, yet he decided to make an alliance with the enemy which cost him his life later.

A. A SURRENDER WITHOUT A FIGHT?

1 Kings 20:1-12 Now Ben-Hadad the king of Syria gathered all his forces together; thirty-two kings were with him, with horses and chariots. And he went up and besieged Samaria, and made war against it. 2 Then 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 loveliest wives and children are mine.'" 4 And the king of Israel answered and said, "My lord, O king, just as you say, I and all that I have are yours." 5 Then the messengers came back and said, "Thus speaks Ben-Hadad, saying, 'Indeed I have sent to you, saying, "You shall deliver to me your silver and your gold, your wives and your children"; 6 but I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time, and they shall search your house and the houses of your servants. And it shall be, that whatever is pleasant in your eyes, they will put it in their hands and take it.'" 7 So the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, "Notice, please, and see how this man seeks trouble, for he sent to me for my wives, my children, my silver, and my gold; and I did not deny him." 8 And all the elders and all the people said to him, "Do not listen or consent." 9

Therefore he said to the messengers of Ben-Hadad, "Tell my lord the king, 'All that you sent for to your servant the first time I will do, but this thing I cannot do.'" And the messengers departed and brought back word to him. 10 Then Ben-Hadad sent to him and said, "The gods do so to me, and more also, if enough dust is left of Samaria for a handful for each of the people who follow me." 11 So the king of Israel answered and said, "Tell him, 'Let not the one who puts on his armor boast like the one who takes it off.'"

12 And it happened when Ben-Hadad heard this message, as he and the kings were drinking at the command post, that he said to his servants, "Get ready." And they got ready to attack the city.

Even though Ben-Hadad with thirty-two kings made a formidable military force, Israel could call upon the Lord to save them from these enemies if they repented from their wicked ways. But we don't see anywhere Ahab called out to the Lord. That was not even an option to him. Actually, Ahab's response to Ben-Hadad fit his general personality. He did not have the character to stand in the face of such a threat.

The elders of Israel rightly saw that such surrender to Ben-Hadad would be the first step to a total loss of sovereignty for Israel. If they wanted to remain a kingdom at all, they had to resist this threat.

Many Christians don't have wills to win in their spiritual battles. They just go along with whatever happens to them. It is no wonder why they get beaten up so often and their lives are constant turmoils one after another. And they walk around like little dogs with tails tucked in between their legs.

B. THE FIRST VICTORY TO AHAB

1 Kings 20:13-22 Suddenly a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel, saying, "Thus says the Lord: 'Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the Lord.'" 14 So Ahab said, "By whom?" And he said, "Thus says the Lord: 'By the young leaders of the provinces.'" Then he said, "Who will set the battle in order?" And he answered, "You." 15 Then he mustered the young leaders of the provinces, and there were two hundred and thirty-two; and after them he mustered all the people, all the children of Israel--seven thousand. 16 So they went out at noon. Meanwhile Ben-Hadad and the thirty-two kings helping him were getting drunk at the command post. 17 The young leaders of the provinces went out first. And Ben-Hadad sent out a patrol, and they told him, saying, "Men are coming out of Samaria!" 18 So he said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; and if they have come out for war, take them alive." 19 Then these young leaders of the provinces went out of the city with the army which followed them. 20 And each one killed his man; so the Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them; and Ben-Hadad the king of Syria escaped on a horse with the cavalry. 21 Then the king of Israel went out and attacked the horses and chariots, and killed the Syrians with a great slaughter. 22 And the prophet came to the king of Israel and said to him, "Go, strengthen yourself; take note, and see what you should do, for in the spring of the year the king of Syria will come up against you."

God's patience and compassion constantly amazes me. Our God is full of compassion and slow to anger and abounding in love, no questions asked. Here we find that the Lord helped this no good, wimpy, heathen-god-worshipping, worthless king win a battle against the army of Syria.

Their hardened idolatry and rejection of God deserved divine abandonment. God had every right to just leave them alone and let them perish without His help. The Lord wasn't doing this because Ahab deserved it but because He wanted to honor His own name with the existence of Israel before the wavering king of Israel and his people.

Whenever a work for God is to be done, we often ask Ahab's question: "By whom?" When many Christian leaders ask God that question, they expect God will answer by bringing someone new to them, a leader or champion that can do the work or at least help with it. However, God's normal way of working is to use the people already with the Christian leader, even if they seem to be a very unlikely army.

C. THE SECOND VICTORY TO AHAB

1 Kings 20:23-30 Then the servants of the king of Syria said to him, "Their gods are gods of the hills. Therefore they were stronger than we; but if we fight against them in the plain, surely we will be stronger than they. 24 So do this thing: Dismiss the kings, each from his position, and put captains in their places; 25 and you shall 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; surely we will be stronger than they." And he listened to their voice and did so. 26 So it was, in the spring of the year, that Ben-Hadad mustered the Syrians and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. 27 And the children of Israel were mustered and given provisions, and they went against them. Now the children of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, while the Syrians filled the countryside. 28 Then a man of God came and spoke to the king of Israel, and said, "Thus says the Lord: 'Because the Syrians have said, "The Lord is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys," therefore I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.'" 29 And they encamped opposite each other for seven days. So it was that on the seventh day the battle was joined; and the children of Israel killed one hundred thousand foot soldiers of the Syrians in one day. 30 But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; then a wall fell on twenty-seven thousand of the men who were left. And Ben-Hadad fled and went into the city, into an inner chamber.

The defeated Syrian army generals didn't want to be the ones to be blamed so they chose to come up with excuses that if they fought in the field, they would have won the battle. We now have a different scenario, because not only was the enemy challenging God's people, he was challenging God Himself. This was the Mount Carmel contest all over again, and the Lord wouldn't let it go unchallenged.

People who do not know our God love to put their limitations upon Him – what He can do and what He can not do. They try so hard to put the Lord in a box which they think they can control. Even though it doesn't work, they sure try it and they even pretend that it works.

To liberal teachers and professors in universities, Darwin's Evolution Theory is no longer a theory, but the facts. They insist no involvement of God in creation process, so that they don't have to be accountable for their sinful lives.

Some Christians often take a cue from non-believers to think that our God has limitations. They think God is a God of the past but not of the present. They think God is a God of a few special favorites but not of all His people. They think that God is

God of one kind of difficult trial, but not of another kind. We need to remember that our God has no limit and we are the ones who need His help all the time.

If a nation loses one hundred twenty seven thousand soldiers in one day, they might as well hang it up. The game is over. It's done. It is no wonder why Ben-Hadad was hiding in an inner chamber.

D. UNCALLED PEACE WITH ENEMY

1 Kings 20:31-34 Then his servants said to him, "Look now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings. Please, let us put sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he will spare your life." 32 So they wore sackcloth around their waists and put ropes around their heads, and came to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant Ben-Hadad says, 'Please let me live.'" And he said, "Is he still alive? He is my brother." 33 Now the men were watching closely to see whether any sign of mercy would come from him; and they quickly grasped at this word and said, "Your brother Ben-Hadad." So he said, "Go, bring him." Then Ben-Hadad came out to him; and he had him come up into the chariot. 34 So Ben-Hadad said to him, "The cities which my father took from your father I will restore; and you may set up marketplaces for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria." Then Ahab said, "I will send you away with this treaty." So he made a treaty with him and sent him away.

Ahab won the battle but lost the victory. What the enemy couldn't accomplish with their weapons, they accomplished with their deception. If satan can't succeed as the lion whom he devours, he will come as a serpent to deceive.

Perhaps Ahab wanted Ben-Hadad and Syria's friendship as protection against the powerful and threatening Assyrian Empire in north. If so, he looked for friends in the wrong places. In reality, Ahab had no will to win this battle. It is no wonder why he was so quick to make peace with his enemy Ben-Hadad.

Yes, our God is merciful and quick to forgive the ones who were against Him. But God's forgiveness was not cheap to Himself. Jesus had to pay for our sin with His life. To receive forgiveness of God, the person must come to the place where he or she repents from one's sins. Without repentance, there is no forgiveness.

Did you notice no one gave the glory to the Lord after Syria was defeated?

E. YOU ARE FINISHED, AHAB

1 Kings 20:35-43 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. 36 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. 37 And he found another man, and said, "Strike me, please." So the man struck him, inflicting a wound. 38 Then the prophet departed and waited for the king by the road, and disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes. 39 Now as the king passed by, he cried out to the king and said, "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.'" 40 While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone." Then the king of Israel said to him, "So

shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it.” 41 And he hastened to take the bandage away from his eyes; and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. 42 Then he said to him, “Thus says the Lord: ‘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.’” 43 So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and displeased, and came to Samaria.

The Lord couldn't allow Ahab to disobey and get away with it, so He instructed one of the sons of the prophets to confront the king about his sin. The “sons of the prophets” were young men who had special prophetic gifts and met in groups to study with elder prophets like Samuel, Elijah and Elisha. Knowing that he would have to catch Ahab by surprise to get his attention, the man wisely set up an “action sermon” that would arouse the king’s interest.

Ahab quickly judged the soldier who was a prophet in reality even though he did the exact same thing.

We often don't have a problem judging others who committed the same sins as we did. Usually there are two responses from people:

1) Judge others with the same sin harshly.

In their eyes, the same sin of others is disgusting and needs to be punished. A great example is king David when prophet Nathan brought him a story about a poor man’s ewe lamb in 2 Samuel 12.

2) Pretend that it is not that bad.

Because we remember our own sins.

Neither one is a correct way to handle it. We need to see our sins and others’ from God’s viewpoint. That is the only way we can see everything correctly.

The man that Ahab judged now became Ahab’s judge and announced that one day the Syrians would slay Ahab. But instead of repenting and seeking the Lord’s forgiveness, Ahab went home and pouted like a spoiled rotten child. He had the sorrow of being a sinner and knowing the consequences of sin, without repenting from his sins.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) In spiritual battles, we must have a determination to fight and win. The war is already won by Jesus. But each battle depends on our decision.

2) We can limit God’s power in our lives by not asking for His help. Our God is all powerful.

3) Before we judge other people’s sins, we must look deep within ourselves.

Matthew 7:1-2 “Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.