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²⁸Then 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." ²⁹So do this thing: Dismiss the kings, each from his position, and put captains in their places; ³⁰and 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. ³¹So it was, in the spring of the year, that Ben-Hadad mustered the Syrians and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. ³²And 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. ³³Then 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.'"
³⁴And 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. ³⁵But 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.

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1. Hill and dale

- a. The ancient pantheistic concept was that all gods were local & their strength lie within limited bounds
 - a1. Each god of each people group was real, but some gods were more powerful
 - a2. Whichever army won a battle was thought to have the most powerful gods
- b. Baal & Asherah were gods of the Canaanites, Chemosh & Molech were gods of Moab, Milcom was god of Ammon, Dagon was god of Philistia, etc.
- c. Ben Hadad & Syria were defeated by a much smaller Israelite army
 - a1. Syria was baffled by this
 - a2. BH's advisors postulated that Israel's God was God of the hills, so they won
- d. The advisors tell BH that Syria's gods ruled over the plains & valleys (as if topography mattered)
- e. The advisors counseled to build a new army of equal strength to the defeated army
 - a1. Syrian army was to meet Israel in the plain
 - a2. Syria would be stronger in the valley
 - a3. The kings were to be replaced by captains

2. Disaster in the dale

- a. Once again Israel was woefully outnumbered (2 small battalions verse a vast army)
- b. The opposing armies faced each other at Aphek
- c. A prophet tells Ahab that since Syria insulted God by saying that He was God of the hills & not the plains, God was going to give Israel victory
 - a1. God will prove that he is God of all
 - a2. Both Syria & Israel will know who God is
 - a3. God will not give Israel victory for their own sake, for they were rebellious
 - a4. God's blessing on Israel was not condoning Israel's behavior or condition
- d. Often, God shows mercy on us, even though we are not in right relationship with Him
 - a1. Eventually, as with Ahab & Israel, God will deal with our sins if we do not repent
 - a2. We must not judge our relationship with the Lord by circumstances
 - b1. Many spiritual believers have gone through deep trials (Job, Jeremiah, Paul, Stephen...)
 - b2. Ps. 2 many wicked people have lived charmed lives (rich man & Lazarus, the Pharisees, Herod...)
- e. Israel kills 100,000 soldiers in battle & a wall around Aphek falls & kills 27,000
 - a1. All of this is the Lord's doing
 - a2. Had Israel responded to God's obvious divine intervention, revival would come
- f. BH hides in an inner chamber in Aphek

3. Evidence does not guarantee repentance

- a. For the 5th time Ahab witnesses a miracle of God but does not repent of his sins (the drought, the fire from heaven at Mt. Carmel, the restoring of rain, & 2 great military victories)
- b. Mt. 7:7-8 only those who seek him respond to God's mercy to them (a closed heart will not be opened by mercy, miracles, or mentoring)