

GOD AND GAMES

“Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses — if you can put riders on them!” (Isa 36:8)

This challenge from the king of Assyria provides insight into the very nature of man. The king of Assyria wanted a contest. He considered Jerusalem so weak that conquering it would have brought no satisfaction. That’s why he offered 2,000 horses to the very enemy he wanted to destroy. A hunter gains no gratification from killing a caged animal? A boxer does not celebrate the defeat of a blind opponent. No Roman would crowd in the coliseum to see a gladiator fight with a tied up rabbit. There is obviously something about the very nature of man that causes him to crave a contest. Remember! Elijah introduced Israel to the One True God by means of a contest (1 Ki. 18:16-40).

Statisticians tell us that soccer is the most popular game in the world with 3.5 billion fans. Millions from the poorest nations on earth fashion crude “soccer balls” from anything available to enjoy the privilege of playing the game. If you don’t like soccer, there are plenty of other games to choose from. Even paralyzed people like to play games. There is something profound about this!

Since man obviously enjoys games, is it possible that God does too? Is it possible that God wants a contest just like the king of Assyria wanted a contest? Since man is created in the image of God, we ought to at least be willing to consider this possibility.

The history of the universe can be briefly summarized under three headings. (1) Before creation God was everything. (2) With creation came rebellion. (3) In the end God will conquer all rebels and will again be everything. Or, as Paul put it, “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:24 - 28).

When Lucifer and his angels rebelled in heaven God could have immediately destroyed them, but He did not. Why? Why did God cast Satan down to earth and give him “dominion, authority and power”? Why do the Scriptures compare the Christian life to a race, a boxing match, and a war? Why is the Christian life a constant struggle? Why does God promise a reward to the “over-comers”? Since nothing happens in the universe without God’s approval, we must conclude that our Creator has orchestrated our present struggle for a purpose. Even the angels in heaven are vitally interested in what takes place on the earth (1 Pet. 1:12). Obviously, we should be too! Our present struggle is important! We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses and there is rejoicing in heaven every time one sinner repents (Lk. 15:10). Why?

In seeking to answer these questions, let us allow God to speak for Himself. God said: **“For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off. See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.” (Isa 48:9-11)**

When Jesus came to earth the first time God allowed Satan to put Him on a cross. But when the game is over, Jesus will come back to earth in triumph to be glorified in His holy people and marveled at among all those who have believed (2 Thess. 1:10). When earthly crowns are cast down before Him, everyone will proclaim: **“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.” (Rev 4:11)** Someday, as you know, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10, 11).

So - **“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” (1 Peter 4:12-14)**