

# Thoughts on Columbia

PRIDE COMES  
before  
THE FALL

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February 3rd, 2003

**W**HILE OUT making routine sales calls to several of my regular customers this past Friday afternoon, I became engaged in conversation around a popular topic—the likely upcoming war with Iraq. As the discussion unfolded, my customer and friend punched up an email he had received earlier that day. He printed out a copy and handed it to me. It contained the text of an article from the *London Times* dated December 24, 2002 titled “Why Any War with Iraq Will be Over in a Flash.”

In the article, the author, Michael Evans, provided a detailed account of the US Military’s massive arsenal and highly superior technology. He wrote about such things as the microwave bomb, a weapon “... capable of knocking out Baghdad's electricity supplies without damaging a single building.” He went on to describe numerous improvements to our technology which will make the Gulf War seem like child’s play.

Earlier in the week I had read an article on the Internet which claimed that when the war begins in earnest, the US Military will bombard Baghdad with over 800 bombs in the first 48 hours. Riding back toward Manassas late Friday afternoon, I began to contemplate the idea of technological warfare and mused upon our nation’s highly superior weapons of war. Then, unexpectedly, as I motored down the 234 Bypass, the Holy Spirit dropped a scripture into my heart.

“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.” (Psalm 20:7)

I had learned this verse many years ago through a scripture chorus that we used to

sing all the time. Isn’t it amazing how those little scripture songs stick with us?

Anyway, as I pondered upon the Word of the Lord, I began to long for and pray toward the Lord’s protection for our nation. For what good is all that firepower if God is not the One fighting our battles?

The next morning (Saturday) I woke up and wrote for a couple of hours. A little after nine I went downstairs and flipped on the Fox News Channel. That’s when I first learned that the Space Shuttle Columbia was missing.

The rest of the day we mourned with the nation. For a brief moment we Americans were one again. It felt like September 11<sup>th</sup> though it was not as painful and it didn’t last as long.

We watched and listened as the President delivered his brief speech. He seemed more rigid, less prepared, than he did at his State of the Union address just a few days earlier. Like all of us, he was ill equipped for what had just happened.

The unexpected demise of the Columbia humbled us all for a few hours. Our technology had failed us. Later that day I thought again of that verse from Psalms.

Our nation’s space program has been the pride of our nation. This year marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of manned flight. So much has happened in just one century. Twenty-four years after the Wright brothers first lifted their crude craft into the air, Charles Lindbergh made his solo flight across the Atlantic in the Spirit of St. Louis. Thirty-five years later we began to send men into orbit. Eight years more and we were walking on the moon. And for many years now

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we have been sending astronauts into space in a re-usable craft. We've enjoyed phenomenal success.

Pride comes before the fall.

Pastor Jeff expressed it well in this morning's service. He articulated so well what I had been feeling all morning. He said that Columbia was a metaphor for America's strength. The grieving we experienced was not so much for the souls lost—most of us didn't know them. Yes we are sad for them and their families. But for most of us, the deeper grief is for what the lost ones and NASA's space program represents—our pride, our strength, our prowess, our superior technology. We grieve because we've been reminded afresh that we are not invincible. And as we mourned, we became one again for a short while.

How blessed we are as a nation to have a leader who understands these profundities. In his State of the Union speech he proclaimed, "We Americans have faith in ourselves, but not in ourselves alone. We do not claim to know all the ways of Providence, yet we can trust in them, placing our confidence in the loving God behind all of life and all of history. May he guide us now, and may God continue to bless the United States of America."

After Saturday's tragedy, our President quoted from the book of Isaiah. Witnessing such things brings deep, resonating hope to my heart. As we move toward what looks like an inevitable war, may we humbly remember the lesson of Columbia. May we learn not to trust solely in our chariots. Rather, let us pray for God's mercies in forgiveness, God's hand of protection in battle, and God's favor and wisdom upon our nation and its leaders.