

Celebrating Liberty

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—Romans 8:21

EVERY YEAR ON JULY 4TH

the people of America celebrate the “Declaration of Independence” that was adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776. This date is one of the most important milestones in the history of the United States, and this year commemorates the two hundred and thirty-fifth anniversary of that great event.

The newly-founded United States quickly became a refuge for countless numbers of people who arrived in this country from every corner of the earth. People from many countries came to the new American nation to seek liberty and freedom from oppression, and to forge a better life for themselves and their families. Some came to escape persecution for religious beliefs in their former homelands, and many were searching for safety and the hope of living in a free society and under the provisions of a meaningful Constitution. There is

little doubt that those who read this magazine have family connections that date back to an ancestor that arrived on the American shores from some other place.

SOCIAL INEQUITIES

During the closing years of the eighteenth century, citizens of Great Britain's thirteen American colonies became increasingly dissatisfied with unfair taxation and various other social inequities that were being imposed upon them by a largely unsympathetic governing body located thousands of miles away in England.

The quest for freedom sparked a spirit of revolt that culminated in the War of Independence. The American Revolutionary War began in 1774 and lasted until September 3, 1783, when British colonial rule over its thirteen American colonies ended with the Treaty of Paris. The treaty was officially signed by representatives of both Great Britain and France in recognition of the newly-formed thirteen United States of America. This great event was the first of its kind and became very significant in relation with other historical revolutions that were soon to follow.

END OF ABSOLUTE MONARCHY

A few years after the American Revolution had given birth to the new nation in America designed to provide freedom for its people, an even greater and more widespread revolt began to take shape in France. The French Revolution lasted from 1789 to 1799 and brought an end to France's long standing rule of absolute monarchy, known as the "Ancien Regime." It was a very dangerous and

complicated time. The French purged their nation of the old aristocracy during a “Reign of Terror” that brought down the long-established autocratic rule of Louis XVI, who was executed by the National Convention.

One of the main reasons for the French Revolution was a growing economic crisis resulting from many years of aristocratic gluttony, mismanagement, and waste, compounded by the huge cost of France’s Seven Years’ War and involvement in the American struggle for freedom. Ruinously high taxes were levied on the peasants and middle classes to support the sumptuous lifestyles of the king, the aristocracy, and the church. It was a general time of growing discontent that was made worse by the fact that hunger was rampant amongst the peasants and working people.

The rising middle class in France had attained a unique social and economic position and sought equity with the honored class. During the last decade of the eighteenth century, there was increasing governmental interference in the private lives of the French people, including the persecution of religious minorities. The people, influenced by ideas of freedom and equality from the writings of Diderot and Voltaire, were also critical of the monarchy’s lack of leadership. The government was seen as self-serving and inefficient, and the legal system was generally considered antiquated and biased. The French monarchy had become the symbol of waste and corruption, and, as the people sought to strengthen their economic status, they also wanted to free themselves from the burden of the aristocracy.

THE BASTILLE

Bastille is a French word meaning stronghold, or bastion, and refers to an ancient notorious prison located in Paris. It had a secret and sinister reputation, and housed not only common criminals, but also people who had been imprisoned for religious reasons, such as the Huguenots, as well as political prisoners, persons who spoke too loudly of the rights of man, or who were involved in the preparation and printing of forbidden pamphlets.

The Bastille was a symbol of the absolute monarchical power of King Louis XVI and the long standing “Ancien Regime” in France. On July 14, 1789, a huge crowd of people gathered to storm the prison, thus marking the beginning of the French Revolution.

In the creation of the Republic in 1792, the red, white, and blue tricolor flag became the symbol of the new French Republic which was centered around its three main ideals, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity for all its citizens.

NOBLE EFFORTS

The founding fathers of the newly created United States of America used their influence wisely in an effort to bring a new sense of liberty and freedom to the people. They are to be commended for their work in establishing an equitable system of self-government based on the Constitution. The people of France had also been set free from long-standing abuse under the power of absolute monarchy. However, their revolution degenerated into a reign of terror that marks the most devastating period in the history of the country.

Each of these two major upheavals provided a new sense of freedom for its citizens, but neither could bring freedom from the most terrible bondage which grips man—the bondage of sin and death—nor could they provide life for the people.

THE FEATURED SCRIPTURE

The featured scripture which appears at the heading of this article is taken from the Apostle Paul's letter to the brethren of the church at Rome. (Rom. 8:21) Here he speaks of the bondage of sin and the corruption of death wherein the whole family of mankind now suffers and which, finally, ends in the grave.

The context of this scripture provides God's wonderful promise of the ultimate deliverance from the sentence of death which has been inherited by the whole human race since sin was introduced in the Garden of Eden by our first parents, Adam and Eve. Paul wrote, "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."—Rom. 8:19-23

The apostle explained that the whole human creation is yet waiting for our Lord's future kingdom

of life and blessing that will soon be made manifest to all people. Under the administration of that kingdom with the glorified Christ, all of the obedient of mankind will be delivered from the bondage of sin, corruption, and death into a lasting and glorious liberty. He further pointed out that mankind will continue to groan and travail until the completion of “The Christ,” which he identifies as possessing the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit of God.

To this special class being called from the world during this present Gospel Age, John said, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”—I John 3:2

ISRAEL IN BONDAGE

The experiences of the children of Israel while in Egypt illustrate the bondage of sin and death that holds captive the entire human family. God had prepared a place for his people in Egypt, and had sent them there to serve as a type of something greater. Throughout the entire lifetime of all of the first generation who had gone into Egypt, he provided them with the very best land and gave them great temporal prosperity.

THE FIRST GENERATION

The scriptural record provides the background information concerning this great event. “Now these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt; every man and his household came with Jacob. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, Dan, and Naphthali, Gad, and Asher. And all the souls that came

out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt already. And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.”—Exod. 1:1-7

JOSEPH

Joseph was especially chosen by God to further the interests of the Israelite people and to serve his Egyptian master. “Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither. And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand. And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. And he left all that he had in Joseph’s hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured.”—Gen. 39:1-6

THE SECOND GENERATION

The lives of the Israelites were about to change, from one of prosperity to one of bitter oppression

at the hands of their taskmasters. Their population had increased abundantly so that, during the second generation, the land of Goshen had become filled with them.

There had also been a regime change, and although the new Pharaoh of the dynasty had no doubt heard of Joseph, he did not know him or appreciate his many contributions to Egypt and its people. Neither had the new generation of Egyptians been witnesses to the gratitude their forefathers had known toward Joseph. They began to fear lest the prosperous Israelites who were living in their midst might rise up against them, or ally themselves with Egypt's enemies.

BITTER OPPRESSION

The account reads, "Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there fall-eth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land."—Exod. 1:8-10

However, it seems that the common sufferings of the Israelites bound them closer together as a people and kept them separate and distinct from the Egyptians. It also served to keep them apart from the Egyptian religious beliefs and principles.

We next read, "Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them,

the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour.”—Exod. 1:11-14

The new Pharaoh did not want to destroy the Israelites as a people, nor to drive them away, but merely to hold them in check and to prevent their further increase in population. His plan was to discourage them by overworking them and forcing them to live under very difficult conditions. The scriptural record shows that these repressive measures were not successful and the Israelites continued to increase in numbers.

SLAVE LABOR

With the new Pharaoh there came new ambitions, especially in building projects. These included building new cities, grandiose public buildings and edifices, and other expensive endeavors. It was in connection with this ambition that the Pharaoh realized that he could use the Israelites as his slave laborers, and that they could do much for the enrichment of the Egyptians by furnishing labor at the mere nominal cost of the meanest sustenance. It was decided to take the youngest, most rugged and healthiest males from their homes and families for service in the Egyptian public works. They served without pay and were forced to survive on very scanty rations. Additionally, they were put under taskmasters who were

directed to work them so hard as to make their lives burdensome.

“SO SHALL THY SEED BE”

Although the Israelites’ lives had become bitter with hard bondage, God had promised them that their seed would multiply. “He [God] brought him [Abram] forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.” (Gen. 15:5) “That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.”—Gen. 22:17

God’s promise to his people was therefore being fulfilled. The record showed that there had been only a handful of 70 persons that entered Egypt. When it came time for them to leave Egypt, about 215 years later, there were 600,000 men, not including women and children. “The children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children.”—Exod. 12:37

It is reasonable to infer that the females of the Israelite company that were not included in the count were no doubt as many more. If there were an average of two children in each family, the total number would then be approximately 2,400,000. In addition, there were servants and other helpers within the various households that added to the number that left Egypt. “A mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle.”—vs. 38

PHARAOH AS SATAN

When man's first parents Adam and Eve were created in the Garden of Eden, they were tested as to their loyalty to God and his law. Because of Satan's temptation, they disobeyed God and received the penalty for sin which was death. All mankind has subsequently come under that sentence. Pharaoh serves as an illustration of Satan, the great tempter of mankind. The bitter lessons of bondage and servitude suffered by the Israelite nation while living in Egypt serve to illustrate the whole human creation that is in bondage to the death penalty.

It is written, "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD."—Job 1:6-12

From this scripture, we learn that God allowed Satan to tempt man, but limits were placed on him in connection with God's ultimate plans for his servants. From the early chapters of the Bible, this is confirmed. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Gen. 3:15) The Apostle Paul also speaks of the time when Satan's head will be crushed. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."—Rom. 16:20

FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE

God delivered a series of plagues to convince Pharaoh, who illustrates Satan, to let the Israelites go free from Egyptian bondage. It wasn't until the tenth and final plague in which all of the firstborn in Egypt died that they were finally permitted to leave.

Pharaoh, however, changed his mind and pursued the Israelites to the Red Sea. "It was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us? And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him: And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand. But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh,

and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon.”—Exod. 14:5-9

God gave instructions to Moses for the deliverance of all the people of Israel. He said, “Lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.”—vss. 16-18

Thus were the people delivered from Pharaoh’s grasp. “And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.

“But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that

great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses.”—vss. 26-31

“Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will pre-pare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him.”—chap. 15:1,2

CELEBRATING THE TRUE LIBERTY

Pharaoh represents Satan, and Egypt illustrates Satan’s world dominion of sin and death. Satan’s army pictures his servants of evil and oppression. The children of Israel typify all who will be blessed under the terms of Christ’s future kingdom who obey the laws of God that will be established at that time. Celebrating the true deliverance from the bondage of sin and death will be a most glorious episode in Christ’s kingdom of liberty for all soon to come.

“The creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”—Rom. 8:21 ■