

Celebrating Independence

The Setting Free from Bondage

***“Is not this the fast
that I have chosen?
to loose the bands
of wickedness, to
undo the heavy
burdens, and to let
the oppressed go
free, and that ye
break every yoke?
—Isaiah 58:6***

IN THIS SCRIPTURE AND

its context, Isaiah speaks in prophetic vision of the future Sabbath Day rest that is being prepared for the entire human family. When Christ’s kingdom is in control over the earth, it will be a time when all mankind will no longer be under the heavy burden of sin and death. They will ultimately be liberated from their bondage and be set free from the oppressive yoke which now binds them.

The prophet provides a symbolic glimpse of the time when the poor groaning creation will come to realize the true meaning of the bread of life. “Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out [afflicted, *Marginal Translation*] to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not

thyself from thine own flesh?” (vs. 7) He thus describes the spirit that is associated with the morning of the new day. “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward.”—vs.8

In this long-reaching prophecy, Isaiah continues by pointing forward to this most blessed time. “Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.”—vss. 9-11

THE AGE OF REVOLUTION

The spirit of freedom from oppression marked the closing decades of the 18th century in a most remarkable and dramatic way. The American Revolution was one of the first of its kind, and became highly significant in relation with all other historical revolutions. It began in the year 1774 and lasted until 1783 when the thirteen original British colonies in North America were officially recognized as the newly formed United States of America. The Treaty of Paris, which was signed by representatives from both Great Britain and France on September 3, 1783, provided for a wide range of provisions in its landmark agreement.

The spirit that propelled American independence led to another revolutionary movement shortly afterward that took place in France, between the years 1789 and 1799. During that tremendous upheaval, France's former rule of absolute monarchy was replaced by republicanism and definitively brought an end to the Ancien Regime as it existed before 1789. The French Revolution became a major turning point in the history of continental Europe, as well as many other places in the world.

“GIVE ME LIBERTY OR GIVE ME DEATH”

Most Americans are familiar with the seven last words of Patrick Henry's address, which he delivered before the Virginia House of Burgesses on March 23, 1775. Henry had served as representative of the Virginia House since 1765. His words, “Give me liberty or give me death,” are mostly remembered as a slogan for independence from British colonial rule.

During this historical period, France was under absolute monarchy, while England was represented by a more moderate, limited monarchy. Although the British Crown had the power of final decision on important matters, the colonies were able to draw upon their limited claims to what was known at the time as their ‘traditional English rights.’ The Virginia House of Burgesses became the first popularly elected legislature in colonial North America, and Patrick Henry was its outstanding spokesman.

Henry had also been elected to the Continental Congress in 1774, and served as the Governor of Virginia between the years 1776 and 1778, being reelected to that office again in 1784. He also served

as a principal leader of the Virginia Militia during the struggle for independence. In his powerful position, he argued openly against British rule and was one of the early advocates of revolt. In his speech that day before the Virginia House of Burgesses, he concluded his address by saying, "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but for me, give me liberty or give me death."

A TIME OF UNREST

During the closing years of the 18th century, citizens of the thirteen American colonies became increasingly weary of unjust taxes and various social inequities that had been imposed upon them by a largely unsympathetic governing body in England. This rising tide of discontent and unrest in the colonies led eventually to open revolt against the policies of the powerful British Empire. The American patriots had gained enough support to act upon their longed-for rights, and ultimately declared their independence from Great Britain and formed the United States of America. The War of Independence, which began in 1775, was fought between Great Britain and the American revolutionaries, together with their powerful ally France, until 1783, at which time the British American colonies became officially recognized in Paris as the United States of America.

The Virginia colony took the initial step toward independence when they voted to set up a committee to represent the colonies under the first Continental Congress, which met in September 1774. They had drawn up a list of grievances against the British

Crown which became the first draft of a document that would formally separate the American colonies from British rule. Shortly afterward, George Washington took command of the Continental army and the eight-year War of Independence began.

In the meantime, a war of words was also being waged in the city of Philadelphia in the Pennsylvania colony. There, on July 2, 1776, the second Continental Congress met to present, and further debate, a second draft of the list of grievances against the Crown. John Hancock, president of the second Continental Congress, was the first one to sign the document. This historic document became known as the Declaration of Independence and included the signatures of fifty-six men representing the Continental Congress.

DECLARING INDEPENDENCE

The Declaration was adopted by the Continental Congress and was dated July 4, 1776. It included the meaning and purpose of the Congress as a unanimous declaration of the thirteen United States of America. The opening statement of the document defined the important basis of independence. It states, "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that

they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The Declaration of Independence was read publicly before enthusiastic crowds of people for the following month.

At the personal request of George Washington and the Congressional Committee, Betsy Ross, who was an upholsterer, was asked to prepare a flag for the newly formed United States of America. She was given information for the design with the hope that it would promote national pride and unity. The flag, when completed, was adopted by Congress on June 14, 1777. A few years later, during a second war with Great Britain—the War of 1812—Francis Scott Key composed “The Star Spangled Banner” as the national anthem for the new country. It was inspired while Fort Mc Henry was under attack on September 13, 1814, during which time the patriots repelled the attack on Baltimore, Maryland, turning the tide of war.

THE REVOLT SPREADS

The revolt against the British Empire quickly spread far beyond the territory of British North America. In the years running up to the war, other nations had begun to quietly provide financial and other assistance to the American patriots. In keeping with the long-standing conflict that existed between France and England and their colonial interests, France officially entered the American Revolution against England in 1778. Spain joined the war against England in 1779, not as an ally of the American rebels, but of France. They, too, had interests abroad and did not want to stir up trouble among their

overseas colonies. In 1780, the Netherlands also joined the conflict but were soon overwhelmed by British naval superiority.

REVOLUTION IN FRANCE

Numerous causes spawned the impending revolution in France, and it would be difficult to point to any specific event that led up to the climax. One of the major causes was a growing economic crisis in France, resulting from years of financial waste and mismanagement. To some extent, the financial situation became desperate because of France's participation in the recent American struggle against England.

During this time, there was a rising middle class in the country that occupied a unique social and economic position. The familiar term 'bourgeoisie' is usually associated with the revolution, but the concept was extended to include the middle class in general, not only in France, but subsequently to other nations. They were a class of social climbers who sought in many ways to strengthen their own economic status. They fought for freedom from the aristocracy while at the same time striving to attain the privileges of that honored and privileged class.

There was growing discontent among the peasants and working classes. It was a time marked by increasing and unjust taxation. There was governmental interference in the private lives of French citizens, and it included the persecution of religious minorities. The people became more and more critical of the monarchy's lack of proper leadership. The government was seen as being inefficient, and the legal system was recognized as being antiquated

and generally outdated. The French monarchy had thus become the ultimate symbol of waste and corruption.

LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY

The revolutionist's slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" was one of several that identified the spirit of the times, but the meaning and ultimate purpose of the revolt was soon lost in chaos. The situation spun out of control under Robespierre's inspired Reign of Terror. The very principles of the slogan became perverted. First, the Royalists were beheaded, and then the moderate Girondists were also murdered. No one was safe from the dreaded guillotine, whether members of the nobility, politicians, intellectuals, or commoners. Even Robespierre himself became a victim of the guillotine in July 1794.

The revolution totally dismantled the corrupt Ancien Regime that had existed in France prior to 1789. It transformed France from an absolute monarchy under King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette, that had monopolized total power over their subjects, to a republic of theoretically free and equal citizens. It was replaced, however, with a series of different governments who in turn lasted for only a short time. The years of turmoil had produced a Bill of Rights and a Constitution. It had also established legal equality among the people, representative democracy and a Code of Law.

BASTILLE DAY

In France, Bastille Day is celebrated each year on July 14th. The day commemorates the storming of the notorious Bastille prison, which marked the beginning of the revolution. The Bastille, therefore, was

a symbol of the absolute and arbitrary power possessed by King Louis XVI and the Ancien Regime. In recognition of the tricolor flag of France, it symbolized the Republic's three main ideals—Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity—for all French citizens. It marked the birth of the sovereign French nation, and the creation of a Republic in 1792.

The French national anthem, “La Marseillaise,” was composed by Claude-Joseph Rouget de Lisle in 1792. It was first played at a patriotic banquet at Marseilles and sung a short time later by the revolutionary forces as they marched on Paris. The Convention officially accepted ‘La Marseillaise’ as the national anthem of France in a decree passed on July 14, 1795.

EXPECTATIONS AND FAILURES

The founding fathers, who designed the Constitution of the United States of America, struggled to establish an equitable system of self-government, and strove diligently to elevate the quality of life for its citizens. It was a noble attempt in which American independence brought a new sense of freedom for its citizens, including the vast numbers of immigrants who arrived to seek a new and better life. The New World, however, had many problems of its own and life was not without difficulty. Selfishness and pride, which was inherited from our first parents Adam and Eve, continued to be a factor in this country, as well as elsewhere.

A short time later, the people of France had been set free from long-time abuse and privation suffered under the absolute power of the monarchy. The Reign of Terror that existed in France during the period of

the revolution could not have been foreseen. The revolution had degenerated into the most devastating period in French history. The establishment of a republic and a new law code provided a new sense of freedom, but it could not bring life and a freedom from the bondage of sin and death.

SETTING FREE FROM BONDAGE

The Scriptures provide us with a wonderful hope for the world and the prospect for true freedom. Luke records an important moment in the life of Jesus, when he went to the synagogue at Nazareth to assume his authoritative earthly ministry. “He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.” (Luke 4:16) Jesus, preaching in his hometown, rose and turned to the words of the Prophet Isaiah that had been prophesied concerning him. “There was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”—vss. 17-19; Isa. 61:1,2

JESUS' COMMISSION

Jesus had been especially anointed to carry forward the eternal purpose of God and his plan of reconciliation for the recovery of the human family from their slavery to sin and death. His commission included the delivery, recovery, and the setting

at liberty from the many aspects of the shackles of bondage that had been placed upon mankind. All of the conditions for his earthly ministry were fully met.

As God's Anointed, Jesus spent his earthly life preaching the message of freedom to the poor in spirit, those who were humble-minded and receptive to the wonderful words that came from his lips. The 'brokenhearted' represents those who had experienced much heartache in the difficulties and adversities of life, and responded favorably to his message. The preaching of deliverance to the 'captives' points to the whole world of mankind who are yet dead because of sin's bondage. His message to the 'blind' includes those who are blind mentally and morally, as well as being blind physically. The setting at liberty of the 'bruised' portrays the blessing that will come upon all the families of the earth when human imperfection and blemishes are ultimately taken away.

A SYMBOLIC VISION

The Prophet Isaiah, writing in symbolic language, provides a glimpse of the freedom that will be realized by the poor groaning creation when they are delivered from the bondage of sin. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped." (Isa. 35:5) The 'eyes' and 'ears' represent not only the physical handicaps of sight and hearing that will be healed, but suggest also the broader reference to the mental seeing and hearing of Truth. He continues, "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." (vs. 6) The human family

will come to love and appreciate their being set free from the shackles of bondage to sin and death with rejoicing and praise to God.

Countless numbers of the human race continue to wait for their liberation from the condition of death, and Isaiah includes all of these in this wonderful prophecy. "The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."—vs. 10

THE ULTIMATE CELEBRATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Many centuries after the Prophet Isaiah wrote his vision, John the revelator also pointed to the time when the bondage of sin, sickness, and death would be taken away. "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful."—Rev. 21:1- 5 ■