



Chapter 3

FIRST HEROES FOR THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM

We must start in Hebrews 11 with the biblical accounts. The first heroes who spearheaded the struggle for freedom are found in the ancient accounts of the Old Testament.

The Exodus and the book of Judges contain many interesting stories of men who led God's people out of various conditions of bondage. There was left-handed Ehud who submerged a dagger deep into the belly of the fat tyrant, and Samson who pulled off an amazing act of faith at the very end of his life, bringing the whole house down on a thousand Philistines. For the purposes of this survey however, we will content ourselves with four great examples: Moses, Gideon, David, and Esther. Each of their stories provides an amazing picture of faith, recorded in Scripture for our example (1 Cor. 10:11).

With the Old Testament stories, we are not to miss the story—the story of God's redemption from the tyranny of sin, fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor are we to miss the courage and faith of these

great men and women of faith. They were willing to take gigantic risks here because their hopes were placed firmly upon a future inheritance beyond the boundaries of this life (Heb. 11:14-16). Thus, they did not shrink back from the battle for righteousness and liberty (Heb. 11:33). The here and now is not entirely unimportant. And, the problem of tyranny is just as egregious as the problem of sin. Much may be learned from the battles waged in the Old Testament era.

MOSES AND THE TYRANNY OF EGYPT

Great empires are typically known by their architectural accomplishments—the towers, ziggurats, and pyramids they leave behind. Based on the sheer size of the towers, Egypt is the only empire from the second millennia before Christ that left evidence of its power. These pyramids were built on the back of slave labor.

The children of Israel were part of this slave force. Exodus 1:11-14 describes the affliction they received at the hands of the Egyptians.

“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.” (Ex. 1:14)

Indeed this was “hard bondage” and lasted for generations as the Hebrews increased their numbers by birth. Fearing that the Israelites would one day outnumber the Egyptians, the Pharaoh ordered the infanticide of all male children born to Israelite women (Ex. 1:15-16). Thankfully, the midwives refused to obey the order of the king because they “feared God” (Ex. 1:17). Conscientious objection and disobedience to the orders of the magistrate is an important first step in opposing tyranny.

The pro-life movement in early Israel will be a testimony to all tyrannies until the end of the world. Here we detect the first movements towards freedom, and often it is courageous, God-fearing women like Puah and Shiphrah who lead the way. Moses’ mother also exhibited the same faith when she opposed Pharaoh’s command and hid her baby son in the bulrushes.

The tyranny was so severe, we read, that “the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage” (Ex. 2:23).

During his early adult years, Moses witnessed firsthand the evils of human tyranny when he came upon an Egyptian beating an Israelite slave. His reaction tells us something about his character and his deep revulsion towards this evil. Young Moses proceeded to kill the Egyptian. Whether this was a lawful killing may be debatable, but suffice it to say the Bible does not condemn him for it. Politically speaking it was a tenuous move. His political power came from his position in Pharaoh's household, but the killing may not have stood up in court if he had been reported. Regardless, the incident resulted in his self-imposed exile from Egypt.

THE EXODUS

The story of the Exodus is a phenomenal account and the most dramatic escape story of all time considered worthy content for several major motion pictures over the years. It is the archetype for the most spectacular redemption of all. It serves as a pattern for Christ's redemption, and for the continuing saga of the monumental battle that continues to play out against tyranny.

From biblical accounts we know that the man Moses was remarkably meek, but supremely courageous. From the outset of his adult life, he appears willing to give up fame and fortune in the empire for the more ignominious and inglorious task of leading a reluctant (and at times ungrateful, rebellious, slave-minded) people to freedom. He confessed his own incompetence to lead the people (Ex. 3:11, 4:10), but he was not afraid to confront Pharaoh on ten separate occasions with threats of plagues and fresh demands to release the people of God. Moses received rather weak support from his own coalition. It is not unusual to find a slave-minded people full of fear, adverse to risks, and generally faithless. Often they will see little use for freedom, even when surviving under minimally acceptable conditions. Though Pharaoh's reactions demonstrated increased levels of hostility on ten separate occasions, Moses courageously pursued his visits. Between chapters 7 and 11 in the Exodus account, there are fourteen references to Pharaoh's hardening of the heart. All the while, the Egyptians were intensifying the burdens on the people, which produced an even more

untenable position for Moses. Nonetheless, he doggedly pursued his demands with the Pharaoh. “Let my people go!”

When the children of Israel made it to the coastline of the Red Sea, it appeared to be the worst of all situations. There they were pinned between a mountain on the north and a mountain on the south, the Red Sea on the east, and the Egyptian armies approaching from the west. At the head of the armies of the greatest empire on earth was the most angry and vengeful monarch imaginable. After suffering through all the plagues, each household in Egypt (including Pharaoh’s household) had lost an eldest son to the avenging angel. The Israelites had no army, no weapons, and no military training. They were slaves. Moreover, mutiny from the ranks was a real threat for Moses. Under these extremely trying circumstances, Moses exhibited remarkable faith, and his words to the people would secure his place in the hall of fame for the greatest heroes of faith of all time.

“And Moses said unto the people, ‘Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.’” (Ex. 14:13-14)

Positively astounding. Highly irregular. A seemingly incongruous response. Indeed, this must be faith.

What political leader has ever faced such an impossible physical situation? Moses had no army, no weapons, and no reasonable hope for any victory whatsoever. Never has a leader been faced with the certainty of a total loss of a nation like this. Never has a leader been forced to look to God for the total solution as Moses was here. He had no military plan and no human-derived solution for the problem at hand. Prior to verse 13, he had received no instructions and no explanation as to how God was going to achieve the victory at the Red Sea.

Then, in verse 16, God tells him to raise his rod in the air. Now typically that is not the sum-total of a military strategy that would produce a victory. Usually, there is more to it than that. But Moses obeyed.

As he raised the rod, what was he thinking? What would you think? "I sure hope this works!" A good deal was hanging on this single moment. And then, the waters begin to surge, in both directions! Miles of ocean water parted ways, God saved His people and destroyed the enemy without any more involvement on the part of humans in this contest.

Obviously, the great lesson to be gleaned from this deliverance is faith in God. Moses is very much the prototypical deliverer. Every true deliverer from human slavery must be a man of stalwart faith. He is more interested in what God will do than in his own contribution in the great struggle for liberty. He fully understands the impossibility of the task before him. He doesn't shrink from the task, and he does all within his capacity, always looking forward to the spectacular deliverance that God will provide in the end. Although final deliverance may be delayed to the last possible second, his faith does not subside while he raises the rod. He is in this first and foremost to see what God will do.

GIDEON

The period of the Judges followed quickly upon the taking of the promised land in Canaan. Within a generation, God's people rebelled. They refused to serve God and quickly found themselves enslaved by the small city states and roving nomadic tribes from the surrounding area. The Midianites were especially known for their scorched earth policy, pillaging the land and consuming all the seed and the available economic capital. Mass poverty and starvation are almost inevitable with such military methods. According to Scripture, the clear intent of these invaders was total destruction (Judg. 6:5). The tyranny was so utterly vicious, that the Israelites were pressed into hiding in caves in the mountains (Judg. 6:2). These are the conditions in which God raised up an unlikely hero in the form of Gideon.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he referred to him as a "mighty man of valor" (Judg. 6:12). Therefore, Gideon was sure that the angel must have mistaken him for somebody else. He explained to the angel that he was a nobody in a no-account family

tucked away in the weak tribe of Manasseh. A leader must be able to rally the troops, and Gideon was rightfully concerned in that he had no troops to follow him into battle with the Midianites.

Why should God choose Gideon, given his weakness of faith? The answer is simple—God can use anyone, and His grace is sufficient for the weakest of them. Gideon is also a man who grows in faith through the process. He may start out with just a mustard seed of faith, but that seed grows into something mighty as God works with him, and this is where we find Gideon as the story unfolds.

Upon his commission to the task, Gideon promptly requested several signs from God. This itself is indicative of a weakness of faith (Matt. 12:40). However, God was gracious, and the fire sent from heaven burned the little offering on the stone. The fleece was dry, and the fleece was wet on two successive tests. Thankfully, these exercises really did grow his faith. Where signs fail to grow faith, but only inspire more doubt and unrelenting demands for more signs, God will refuse to provide them.

The first challenge laid upon Gideon was to instigate a generational repentance. Evidently, Israel's root problem was idolatry, and this was the thing that brought the curse of slavery to the nation. But God's leaders must set the example in this matter of repentance. Before God will bring a blessing to the nation, the leaders must first lead in repentance. So Gideon moved ahead on shaky knees with this challenge to destroy his father's idol grove (Judg. 6:27). In the middle of the night, he took a group of friends and burned the Baal altar to the ground.

Gideon's father's reaction offers a remarkable element to the story. It seems that he was impressed with Gideon's courage and defended his son's decision before the elders of the city. In memorial of his son's actions, he renamed Gideon "Jerubbaal;" a name which casts disrepute on the Baal god. For the rest of his life, Gideon's name served as a perpetual taunt in the face of the Baal and to anyone who served this false god. This presented a clear example of generational reformation that began in the life of a young man and was then shared by his father retroactively. When a father or a grandfather rejoices in the

repentance exhibited in the lives of sons and grandsons, there must be generational repentance developing, and this then becomes the seed of freedom.

Gideon's major lesson in faith came when God began to whittle down the numbers assembled to fight the Midianites. Out of millions of Israelites, Gideon was able to assemble a paltry 22,000 to fight the 140,000+ Midianite warriors. After allowing the "fearful and the cowardly" (Deut. 20:8) to return home in accord with biblical law, he was left with a mere 10,000 men. Evidently, these were not courageous times. Not many were interested in fighting for their liberties. After this, Jehovah God challenged Gideon to bring the numbers of his army down even lower. "The people are yet too many" (Judg. 7:2). Using something of an arbitrary sorting method (based on how men drink water from a brook), Gideon was left with the 300, a ratio of 500 to 1 against the Midianite army. With that, Gideon was ready to engage the greatest battle of his life.

However, Gideon's faith was still weak, so the Lord sent him incognito into the camp of the Midianites. There he received a little insight into the enemy's faithlessness and fear. He realized that the enemy was more certain of the power of Jehovah at this point, than were the tribes of Israel! This boosted the faith of our man Gideon a good bit. He returned to his camp with a true sense of God's sovereign power, and then he "gets in the game." He announced to his men, "Arise, for the Lord has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand!" His expectations of victory were certain at this point. The premonition of "what God was going to do," sent chills down his back and he could hardly wait to engage the battle. This is the point at which he invented the rather unconventional military technique of pitchers and trumpets.

"And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do. When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side

of all the camp, and say, 'The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.'" (Judg. 7:16-18)

In the history of military science, this strategy has not proven successful. However, technique is not of essence here. The lesson for the Christian warrior is total faith. Self-confidence can only take him so far. In the battle for freedom, nothing less than God-confidence will take him the distance. Although Gideon started with no confidence, he was tutored in God-confidence in preparation for the battle.

Gideon took what resources he had at hand, strategically positioned three companies and commenced battle with the trumpets and pitchers. Instantly, Midian's armies were put into a state of chaos, and the battle was a complete rout, as Israel slaughtered some 140,000 of the enemy force.

The battle for freedom is usually waged against unspeakable odds. The majority of the "faithful" whom we would hope to stay in the battle walk away disheartened. The loyal opposition to tyranny often turns out to be less loyal than first expected. As modern apostasies spread through the Western world, the Christian pool of men and women who stand for righteousness and fight for liberty shrinks. The temptation to throw in the towel is unrelenting. Many Christians come up with eschatological or theological explanations for giving up. Others water down the antithesis and avoid assessing the state of affairs by the standard of God's law, and they will do anything except believe. What is needed in times like these are men and women of indomitable faith and unflagging courage.

We set out to build a movement from 400 to 10,000, and then we find that God cuts it back to 400 again. No doubt this happened to many leaders within the Christian church over the centuries. However, the man of faith must come to realize this is a battle of faith. When things appear to be at the very worst, we should be even more encouraged. During the most cowardly and faithless times of all, we can expect the greatest things of all. When the opposition rises to the very highest levels, and the resistance appears the weakest it has ever been, we are only that much closer to the most amazing victory ever seen. The battle is well in our hands! Let us advance. Faith best

shows itself strong when facing giants, and when the odds are 300 to 140,000. This is God's *modus operandi*. First we look for the presence of faith, and then we expect the victory (1 John 5:4).

DAVID AND THE MIGHTY MEN

After 400 years of slavery and brief moments of liberation during the period of the judges, the children of Israel finally reach their "glory days" under the military conquests of David and his mighty men.

As a young man, probably no older than 17 years of age, David was given the task of delivering food to his brothers who were fighting with Saul's army against the Philistines. David came upon the Valley of Elah, where the Israelite army was hunkered down, cowering before the threats of the giant Goliath. The man was almost ten feet tall; a true giant and a powerful champion for the Philistine army. David's first response to the giant is instructive: "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam. 17:26). Others were cowering in fear, but David was overcome with what his brothers thought to be youthful arrogance and foolishness. However, David explained his thinking to King Saul in 1 Samuel 17:36-37, harking back to his confrontation with a lion and a bear:

"Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."

First, young David had great confidence in God whom he believed helped him kill both a lion and a bear. These were smaller, but nonetheless difficult challenges previously encountered, and he was confident that God had brought about victory in each confrontation. Faith remembers what God has done in the past and builds on that record. Faith will hold on to those stories and recall previous encounters with the living God.

Secondly, David spoke out of his rock solid conviction regarding certain truths by which he interpreted the situation at hand. It is one thing for a lion to threaten the life of a lamb. It is quite another for

uncircumcised Philistines to defy the armies of the living God. Later we read that David ran at the enemy without hesitation (1 Sam. 17:48). Why would young David take one look at this giant, completely ignore his formidable size and strength, and challenge him in this way? Others thought him out of his mind or carried away with youthful bravado. But his words did not ring of egotistical youthfulness. The problem, as David saw it, was that this tall fellow had defied the armies of the living God. David believed what he had been taught about God, about the people of God, and about the vision God had laid out for His people. As a young boy, David had listened to what his father and grandfather taught him from God's Word, and he believed it. Those truths became convictions that ran in his bloodstream. Convictions press a man to courage, and courage leads to action. Thus, David ran at the giant, let loose a stone from his sling, knocked him to the ground, and cut off his head with the giant's own sword.

In this dramatic event, David saw the Giant standing behind the giant. His overwhelming sense of the power of God and the truth of God's Word defined his reality more than the visible enemy. This is another tremendous picture of faith.

THE MIGHTY MEN

King David's forty year reign comprised the glory years of Old Testament Israel. The remaining centuries were filled with more idolatry and the accompanying slavery that characterize wicked nations. With David however, something of a foothold was gained for the kingdom of God. 2 Samuel 23 presents an inspirational telling of the story.

Since the days of Samson, the Philistines had maintained "dominion" over Israel (Judg. 14:4), and David and his mighty men were instrumental in re-securing Israel's independence from these oppressive powers. There is something commendable about these men that God's Word considers important enough to include in the canon. These are, in a real sense, "God's heroes," and they possessed traits we would do well to emulate.

What we notice in these men, first and foremost, is the quality of strength and resilience. Their military feats as related in 2 Samuel 23 are nothing short of staggering.

The stalwart warrior named Shammah (vs. 11) was abandoned by the rest of the army in the field of lentils and stood his ground. He took on the entire host of the Philistines and singlehandedly obtained the victory that day.

Adino the Eznite (vs. 8) took out 800 men at one time.

Eleazar (vs. 9-10) fought until the sword clave to his hand.

Abishai (vs. 18) took down 300 men at one time.

Indeed, these were powerful men of war, perhaps unmatched by any other men in the history of warfare. What supernatural energy must have been employed to take out 800 men at one time! Adino would have had to kill at a rate of 80 an hour for 10 hours straight. Such perseverance is truly remarkable. The average man is easily discouraged when abandoned by his comrades and left to fight alone in a field of lentils. He becomes disheartened after the third and fourth assault from the enemy. It takes a special faith and courage to continue in the battle alone, day after day, week after week, and year after year, facing new enemies all the time. When the battle is joined, the man of faith stays in the fight until the brutal end.

Men like Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel (vs. 20), are willing to make a total commitment to the battle. He leaped into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion in hand to paw combat. Of course, he must have known that only one of them would come out alive. When a man commits to the battle, he is all in. He will fight to the death.

Another important characteristic to be found in these mighty men was a dichard loyalty to each other and to their captain. Three of David's men fought through a garrison of the Philistines to retrieve a cup of water from the well of Bethlehem. When David received the gift, he threw it to the ground and in essence, says, "I don't drink blood. This is the blood of the men who risked their lives to quench my thirst from the well of Bethlehem" (2 Sam. 23:16-17). This picture of loyalty

is unforgettable, poignant and powerful. Some men are willing to die for the truth, for a principle of theology or for a cause like freedom. But would they give their lives for their brothers? Most of our coalitions are torn apart by minor differences and intramural quarrels because men are willing to die for the truth—but they are not willing to die for their brothers. This will never do. I am thankful that there are a few men who are willing to die for something, but the Christian must be willing to die for his brothers. In so doing, he follows in the footsteps of his Master (1 John 3:16).

ESTHER

Esther also played a part in the struggle for freedom at a critical juncture in the history of Old Testament Israel. The nation was facing its most precipitous challenge at the hands of the largest empire in the history of the world up to that point—the Medo-Persian Empire. A bloody genocide was in the making, threatening total extinction for the Israelites. The wicked man Haman joins the ranks of other wicked rulers like Hitler, Nero, and Herod. These tyrants are dangerous men, and they work their way into the highest echelons of power where they can do the most damage.

At the beginning of Esther's story, the future of God's people was hanging by a thread. However, God providentially raised up Esther as the wife of the King of Persia for a very special purpose—to preserve His people.

When God's people are marginalized and have zero influence politically speaking, there is one public policy item that takes first priority. Based on Old Testament records of Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah, the preservation of God's people trumps all. This is the last line of defense for liberty. If the magistrate kills all the Christians, the possibility of righteousness and liberty prevailing in that society is removed. There is no more salt, and the light is extinguished. The Gospel may not return to that people for centuries.

As the story goes, Esther intercedes for her people with the King, at the risk of her life. "If I perish, I perish," she says (Esth. 4:16). Esther's respect for her uncle Mordecai's advice, and her love for her

people are commendable, but it is her courage and faith which sets her apart as a great heroine in the age old battle for liberty.

THE APOSTLES

The Roman powers and local magistrates in the empire began persecuting the Christian faith almost immediately upon Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Two themes emerge out of the Acts of the Apostles: the persecutions and the consequent expansion in evangelism and the church.

The Jewish authorities incarcerated Peter and John (Acts 4:3), and they were back preaching in the public forum the next day (Acts 4:31). Again, the authorities arrested them (Acts 5:18), an angel released them, and they were back in the temple preaching the next day (Acts 5:25). Herod killed James and arrested Peter (Acts 12:2-3), an angel released Peter, and "the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24). When asked why they persisted in disobeying the magistrates, Peter and John candidly responded with, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). God's law trumps man's law, and this becomes the basis for civil disobedience where there is direct conflict.

The Apostle Paul is imprisoned and beaten in almost every city to which he brings the Gospel. On the one hand, he accepts his tribulations with a contented, positive frame of mind. When arrested at Philippi, he sings in the prison, witnesses to the jailer, and baptizes the man's household (Acts 16:25-31ff). Then, he insists on his rights as a Roman citizen, requesting a formal apology from the local authorities (Acts 16:37). Christians are not doormats. They will fight lawfully for just dealings with the integrity of the Apostle Paul. At the same time, they will treat their enemies with respect, compassion, and mercy. This is the Spirit of Christ. We preach the Gospel, and we insist on just treatment as defined by God's laws. This provides a balanced perspective for Christians in our day who face tyrannical persecution on all sides, from Pakistan to Pennsylvania.