

Lesson Thirty-Six

The French Revolution

LESSON IDEA

To dispel myths about the French Revolution, and show that it was a grab for power by men with sinister designs, not a fight for freedom.

PREPARATION

Become familiar with the terms Bastille (Bas-teel) and Duc d'Orleans (Duke d'Or-lay-ahn) so they can be easily pronounced when during the lesson. encountered in the story. Other words which members of the family may not understand also should be defined or simplified.

IN 1789 there was in France an ancient prison called the Bastille. It has become the focus of a legend in most history books. Does any one know why, and what kind of prison it was? [Encourage discussion to determine how much your family knows about the French Revolution and the storming of the Bastille.]

Such authors as Thomas Carlyle and Charles Dickens have portrayed the Bastille as a grim, stone fortress with dark dungeons and monstrous torture chambers crawling with toads, lizards, rats, and spiders. They have claimed that it was populated by poor peasants rotting away for petty crimes. Perhaps most gruesome of all is the legend of the special room scented with flowers and lit by fifty candles where captives would be brought before the head of the prison and promised their liberty. Then, the story goes, as the prisoners' eyes began to brighten at the prospect of freedom, their sadistic jailer would give a signal. The floor would open and the victims would fall upon a wheel of knives and be sliced to pieces.

Such is the legend. If we accept it as fact, as many have, it becomes plausible that such a monstrous facility could spark a bloody revolution, and that it would be similar to the American Revolution: an authentic struggle for freedom from despotism. But the legend of the French Revolution is false, and no one came to know it better than the French people themselves, who longed for liberty but received misery, death, and dictatorship instead.

Let us begin our discussion of the myths with

the Bastille. It was indeed an ancient prison, with high stone walls, drawbridges, and cannon. It had dungeons, but they had not been used for a quarter-century. All the rooms in use had windows, stoves or fireplaces, good beds, and furniture. The food was excellent and plentiful. Prisoners were allowed to occupy themselves in various ways (books, music, and drawing, for example) and were in some cases were allowed to meet in each other's rooms for games.

The Bastille had never been a prison house of the poor; most of its inmates were noblemen and aristocrats. By 1789 it was nearly empty and plans were already underway to have the symbol of bygone tyranny torn down and replaced with a public square. The architectural plans for the transformation has been published as early as 1784.

When the mob stormed this fortress in 1789, it found only seven inmates in the entire prison, all of whom were living comfortably. Four were forgers, two were lunatics who had been imprisoned to protect others, and one was a count who had been jailed for "monstrous crimes" at the request of his family. There were no captives in chains, no skeletons or corpses, no torture chambers — none of the legendary horrors.

Why, then, did the mob march on the Bastille? Writers at the time agree that the motive was not to liberate prisoners or protest against authority, but simply to obtain guns and munitions stored there.

The governor of the prison had three possible courses of action: surrender to the demands of the mob; train his cannon on the throng and massacre thousands; or ignore the mob, trusting in the security of the thick walls and drawbridges.

He opted for surrender, fearing to use his power and refusing to rely on the Bastille's fortifications. In exchange for this appeasement and capitulation, he was given a promise that no one would be injured. Within hours, however, he and others in the Bastille were beaten, bayoneted, and beheaded. Their skulls were affixed to long steel-tipped

pikes and paraded through the streets as trophies of the day's work. There were a few in the mob who opposed this barbaric massacre, but they were either beaten senseless or killed.

How does this initial event of the French Revolution compare with the battle of Lexington and Concord, which marked the beginning of the American Revolution? What prevented such atrocities in the American struggle for independence? [Encourage discussion. Point out that American revolutionary leaders called out militia units, while French revolutionary leaders assembled a mob. Any mob can be incited to murder and pillage if its leaders choose to lead it in that direction. The American leaders had no such motive.]

ACCORDING TO THE LEGEND, the mob that stormed the Bastille and massacred its officials consisted of enraged peasants, farmers, and poor people from the cities. Actually, writers of the period have testified that out of the 800,000 inhabitants of Paris, only about 1,000 took any part in the siege of the Bastille. The rest of the mob was apparently hired for the job. One writer noted: "They did not belong to the nation, these brigands that were seen filling the Hotel de Ville, some nearly naked, others strangely clothed in garments of divers [various] colours, beside themselves with rage, most of them not knowing what they wanted, demanding the deaths of the victims pointed out to them, and demanding it in tones that more than once it was impossible to resist."

What is a "brigand"? [Ask a family member to look it up the term in a dictionary. It is synonymous with "bandit," and is defined as "one who lives by plunder, usually as a member of a band."]

Another writer reported overheard two men say on the morning of the massacre, "Do you want to earn ten francs? Come and make a row with us. You have only got to cry, 'Down with this one! down with that one!' Ten francs are worth earning."

The other answered, "But shall we receive no blows?"

"Go to!" said the first man, "it is we who are to deal the blows!"

It is reasonable to ask, "Who hired such bandits and criminals to lead for the mob that stormed the Bastille? And why? The answer, simply put, is

men who were jealous of the King's power and who wanted to such power themselves. We know this is the case, due to the way the revolutionary leaders lived and acted after gaining power, because they have told us so.

One of the principle conspirators seeking power was a distant cousin of the King, the Duc d'Orleans. His two ruling passions, according to contemporaries, were money and debauchery. A "playboy" by modern standards, the Duke had few (if any) morals. A faithless husband, he was suspected of accosting virtually any ladies who met his eye anywhere at any time. He kept company with the most worthless men and women of his day, and had only contempt for the common people whose cause he was presumably supposed to champion. He would, for instance, allow "no soldiers, men in livery, workmen, or people in caps and shirts" into the gardens on his estate.

This aristocrat of corrupt and vicious tastes had a burning hatred for the French Queen, Marie Antoinette, who had rejected his advances and humiliated him in sundry other ways. He also despised the King, Louis XVI, who had refused to make him grand admiral of the fleet. Propelled by such hatreds, and financed with a sizable personal fortune, the Duc d'Orleans had little trouble assembling a force of like-minded conspirators who also sought to usurp the reins of power.

There were other men with sinister designs — members of the secretive Illuminati and its front group, the Jacobin Clubs — but we leave the discussion of their complex origins and stratagems for a later lesson. They, too, were anxious not only to rule France, but other countries as well. Their plan, as revealed in their own documents, was to abolish religion, overturn existing governments, and remake the world according to their own self-serving blueprint, and control the wealth, resources, and people of the entire planet.

It mattered not whether the French people wanted such a revolution. In the eyes of the secret conspirators, the nation was merely large herd of sheep, to be manipulated and exploited by shepherds (themselves) assisted by loyal sheepdogs (their like-minded agents). A figurehead leader was needed to trigger the revolution, and the Duc d'Orleans, a member of the Illuminati, was a suitable choice: it was said that he "bears an imposing name, he has millions to distribute, he hates the

