

Lesson Thirty-Eight

The Liberty Bell

LESSON IDEA

To develop an appreciation for another great symbol of American freedom, the Liberty Bell, by recalling its history and significance.

PREPARATION

Have a Bible on hand to look up the quotation on the Liberty Bell; read the "Concluding Thought" section to prepare examples and ideas appropriate to your family; and plan for the project suggested in "During the Week."

IN PRIOR WEEKS we have discussed three of our nation's great symbols of freedom — "Old Glory" (our flag); the Star-Spangled Banner (our national anthem); and the Statue of Liberty situated on Liberty Island in New York harbor.

But we have saved what many historians consider to be the best until last. There is another symbol, older and more famous than the others. Were we to visit Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, we could still see this giant that weighs more than 2,080 pounds. Can anyone name this famous symbol of freedom? [Ask each family member to answer.]

It is, of course, the Liberty Bell. It rests today in the Tower Room of Independence Hall, the birthplace of freedom, where the Declaration of Independence was debated and signed and where the U.S. Constitution was written. The Liberty Bell is older than both documents. The province of Pennsylvania paid around \$300 for it in 1752, 24 years before John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Richard Henry Lee, and the other colonial patriots gathered in 1776 to declare independence from the tyranny of a British king.

Its actual year of birth, however, was 1751, when Pennsylvania's governing body, still loyal to Britain, decided to have a bell made for the new assembly hall. It was to be very special — one that would not only call representatives to meetings,

but also summon the town's citizenry to the State House for important events or announcements. It was to be the largest bell in the 13 colonies, with a voice to match its size so that everyone, including those on the outskirts of the province, could hear its call.

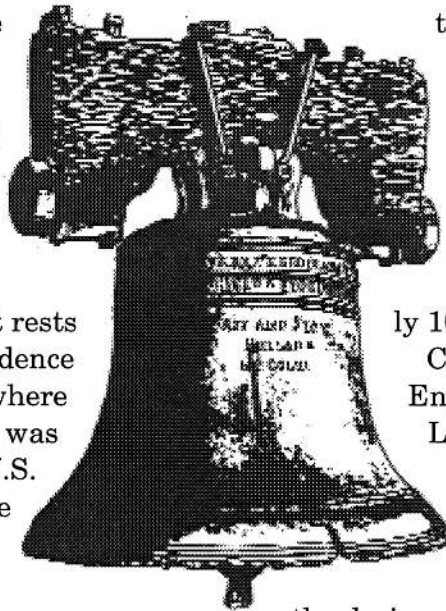
The Liberty Bell was to be dedicated to the two concepts most revered by the colonists: liberty and God (the source of liberty). It was therefore decided that the shoulder of the bell (the wide part near its top) would be inscribed with the words of Leviticus 25:10. Does anyone know that biblical verse? [If not, have someone find it in the Bible and read it to the group: "Proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof."]

Since no bell the size of that envisioned by the Pennsylvania Assembly had ever been cast in America, the legislators decided to have it made in England. They sent an order to Robert Charles, the colonial agent in London, for a bell weighing approximately two thousand pounds and costing approximately 100 pounds sterling.

Charles contracted the leading English manufacturer of bells, London's Whitechapel Foundry, which had manufactured bells for nearly two centuries. Whitechapel's master craftsmen decided to cast the colonial bell in

the design of "Great Tom," one of Westminster Abbey's most famous bells. Before year's end, the Philadelphia version of "Great Tom" was on its way to America, ready to "Proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof."

Impatient to hear its ring, the assemblymen ordered that it be displayed in the State House yard while Philadelphians gathered round to hear its first sounds. At the first stroke, it cracked, a disaster believed to be the result of mishandling



FOR SERIOUS STUDENTS

Needless to say, greatness is not confined to those active in the political affairs of our nation in 1776. There have been many great American patriots throughout our history. Visit your local library for books about them, and have family members read one or more volumes describing their successes, setbacks, struggles, and achievements. The list could include such works as *Reminiscences* by Douglas MacArthur, *The Life and Words of Robert Welch* by G. Edward Griffin, and *War As I Knew It* by George S. Patton. [NOT E: Add a few others for variety. — rwl]

on the journey. In 1752 the sea voyage to America was hazardous, and the risk of damage great.

An attempt was made to return the cracked bell to England on the ship that had brought it, but the master of the vessel was unable to take it aboard. The Foundry refused to accept responsibility for the damage because, it claimed, the bell had been in perfect condition when it departed London. To this day, the Liberty Bell is the only Whitechapel bell ever to have cracked. If you had been a Pennsylvania assemblyman in 1752, what would your reaction have been? How would you have solved the problem? [Ask each family member for an opinion.]

AMERICAN INGENUITY resolved the predicament. The determined Pennsylvania patriots found two local workmen, John Pass and Charles Stow, who agreed to try recasting the damaged bell. On the second attempt they were successful and, in August 1753, the refurbished Liberty Bell rang-out majestically to convene the Assembly. It would do so faithfully for the next 23 years. The Philadelphia legislators did not know then, but realized later, that during those two decades the mighty bell would announce some of the most dramatic meetings and events in American history.

Summoned by the Liberty Bell's compelling voice, Philadelphians first learned that George III was their new King. In 1765 its muffled tolls announced the approach of the British ship *Royal Charlotte*, which was transporting the despised English tax stamps to Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maryland. A few weeks later it tolled once again in sorrowful tones as the colonists mourned

the "death of liberty" and buried the despised stamps in a public ceremony.

In 1770, those assembled at its call resolved that the taxing policy of England was subversive of the colonists' constitutional rights. On June 1, 1774, the bell was again muffled and tolled in sympathy for the people of Boston when the British closed the city's harbor in an attempt to strangle commerce between the colonies. After the battles of Lexington and Concord in 1775, the bell called 8,000 Philadelphians to the State House yard, where they unanimously pledged themselves to the cause of liberty.

THE FOLLOWING YEAR (in the summer of 1776), patriots from the colonies met beneath the Liberty Bell's steeple in the Assembly Hall to consider their future with the British Empire. The bell remained silent as talk of independence filled the air, the vote was taken, and the Declaration of Independence was adopted. Then on July 8th, after copies of the Declaration were printed and ready for public readings, the bell rang out the joyous news, signaling the beginning of a gala celebration that was marked by military salutes and parades heralding the birth of the new nation. True to the Biblical words inscribed on its shoulder, the huge bell, as envisioned by its originators, proclaimed liberty "throughout the land unto the inhabitants thereof."

Before a year had passed, however, the magnificent bell of liberty was in danger of being destroyed. The British army under General Howe was marching toward Philadelphia with plans to chase the Continental Congress from its legislative roost, then headquarter for the winter in the city that would become renowned as the birthplace of American liberty. Realizing that the Redcoats would like nothing better than to capture one of the great symbols of American independence and melt it down for their war machine, colonial patriots loaded the Liberty Bell onto a wagon and headed for the safety of Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Tradition tells us that "John Jacob Mickley hauled the bell to Bethlehem, where his wagon broke down, whereupon it was transferred to Frederick Leaser's wagon, who brought it on to Allentown." The bell was then hidden below the

