



"Liberty is rendered even more precious by the recollection of servitude."

—Cicero

22-Apr-16

Freedom the Right Way

April 19 marks the anniversary of three major events in American history. Not only is April 19 the day the American Revolutionary War began in 1775, but it was also the final day of the Branch Davidian standoff in Waco, Texas, in 1993 and the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. On seeing these juxtaposed, conservative columnist Jonah Goldberg remarked, "One of these things is not like the other." Indeed, Americans tend to be proud of the one and embarrassed or distressed about the other two.

All three events have something in common, however: Each was an attempt to provoke a change through violence. At Lexington and Concord, where 122 died, the Massachusetts colonists wished to throw off the heavy hand of Britain, particularly its onerous taxes and high-handed manner, through armed rebellion. The federal government's final assault on the Branch Davidian compound, in which 76 civilians died, not only aimed to end the siege, but was also designed to move the baseline of federal power over gun owners and religious sects. Finally, Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, the Oklahoma City bombers, bombed the federal building there to push back at the government's violent overreaches of authority at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and Waco. The death toll there was 168.

Only one of these, the first, produced anything of value, the United States of America (and some would say that the jury is still out on that). Even so, over its eight-year duration, the Revolutionary War cost the lives of approximately 125,000 people, and thousands more were wounded and displaced. Despite their aims of political independence and self-determination—which many people feel are worth fighting for—the colonists paid a stiff price for their rebellion, as did their allies and enemies. Such are the bitter fruits of violent change.

Spring contains another anniversary, that of the Israelites leaving their forced servitude in Egypt. Of course, their liberty also had a high cost, as Egypt had to pay for the Israelites' redemption with the lives of their firstborn. But the children of Israel themselves did not have to lift their hands in rebellion and warfare to procure their freedom. The previous night, they waited in fear and astonishment behind their blood-splattered doorposts and lintels as their Redeemer [God](#) sent "the destroyer" ([Exodus 12:23](#)) through the land of Egypt to kill all their firstborn, "from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the female servant who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the animals" ([Exodus 11:5](#)).

In our sensitive and antiseptic age, it is difficult for us to grasp just how much death occurred on that [Passover](#) night. We do not know the population of Egypt at the time, but it would not be outside the realm of possibility to believe that, if there were more than two million Israelites, the Egyptians would number several million individuals as well. Say there were five million, just to make the math easier.

If the Egyptians had large families, perhaps composed of ten people each, it would mean that the kingdom contained 500,000 families—and each one of those families saw one to three of their members fall to the plague of the firstborn. This would mean, then, that on one night at least half a million Egyptians died (up to as many as 1.5 million), not counting all the animal firstborn that also perished! If their families were smaller, and thus more numerous, the number of firstborn who died that night rises precipitously.

[Moses](#) records, "There was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead" ([Exodus 12:30](#)). Later, once the sun was up,

"the Egyptians urged the [children of Israel], that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, 'We shall all be dead'" (verse 33). Verse 39 makes this more explicit, saying that the Israelites "were driven out of Egypt and could not wait [to let their bread rise]." So their wilderness journey began in involuntary haste, and once out of Rameses they would hurry to cross the border of Egypt to secure their new-found freedom.

But as we know, within a few days, Pharaoh regretted letting the Israelites go. He called out his army, "six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt" ([Exodus 14:7](#)), and pursued his fleeing ex-slaves, catching them huddled against the shore of the Red Sea. The Israelites thought they were doomed, and as was typical of them, bewailed their fate.

But God again showed Himself strong in their behalf, fighting for them through the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, which in its opening gave them an avenue of escape, and in crashing closed destroyed the Egyptian host. Thousands more Egyptians died, this time obliterating the kingdom's military might: "Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained" ([Exodus 14:28](#)).

Yet not even one Israelite had been required to bear arms against the Egyptians to gain their freedom. All they had to do was to follow Moses as he followed the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night ([Exodus 13:21-22](#)). Their task was not difficult. It was not ambiguous. It was not complicated.

That is the pattern God set to show how to achieve true freedom. The apostle Paul gives the same command in [I Corinthians 11:1](#): "Imitate me, just as I imitate Christ." Even more to the point, when Jesus called His disciples, who are types of all Christians, He instructed them, "Follow Me" ([Mark 1:17](#); [2:14](#); [8:34](#); [10:21](#)). This command is among the last things He said to both Peter and John after His resurrection ([John 21:19](#), 22).

It still holds true. Following Christ as He leads us to the [Kingdom of God](#) remains the essential outline of how to live as a Christian. It is the path to the comprehensive liberty that we can have in Christ. If we model our lives after the perfect life of our Savior, He will bring us to eternal life in His Kingdom,

which is far superior to the physical Promised Land that the Israelites sought—and never received because of their constant [sin](#) and rebellion against their Savior.

Like the Israelites, we do not have to take up arms to break our shackles. God secured our freedom for us by His gracious gift. But He wants us to use our freedom to abstain from sin and to pursue righteousness and [holiness](#) (see [Romans 6:15-23](#)), found in the life and [teachings of Jesus Christ](#). If we have the [faith](#) to take up this life-altering mission, He will do the fighting for us and lead us into His promised rest (see [Hebrews 4:1-10](#)).

This is the way to procure freedom the right way.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Freedom and Unleavened Bread](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Christian freedom has nothing to do with location but how we think. Like Israel on the edge of the Red Sea, we are too willing to turn back to our enslavement. Like Christ, carrying the instrument of our death (the cross), we also carry with us the instrument of our own death (our carnal minds). By imbibing on God's Word (maturing from milk to meat), we will incrementally displace our carnality, responding to God's shaping of our character to attain the Kingdom of God and membership in His Family.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Shepherd's Voice](#)

by Mike Ford

God's people are often compared to sheep. Lately, however, some have begun to question whether they need a human shepherd. How does one know whether a minister is a true shepherd of God?

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