



"Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster."

—Friedrich Nietzsche

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A Patriot and a Traitor (Part One)

In the Olivet Prophecy, [Jesus Christ](#) prophesies that in the time of the end, "many will be offended, will betray one another, and hate one another" ([Matthew 24:10](#)). We need to take this as a warning and do what we can to remain true to both our [God](#) and our brethren. Even the strongest among us can fall prey to emotions that cause [offense](#), betrayal, and hatred.

This is the story of a man who was one of America's earliest patriots as well as one of its most reviled traitors. His family, among the earliest Europeans in North America, were considered near-royalty in their Rhode Island community. This privilege followed his father to Connecticut, where he became a successful businessman and leader.

Growing up, this future patriot and traitor, Benedict Arnold, was handsome, strong, athletic, and adventurous, and his attendance at a prestigious private school offered him the promise of a bright future. But his good fortune took a turn for the worse when several of his siblings died in a local outbreak of yellow fever. His father began drinking heavily and dissipated his family's fortune. Without any money, his plans to attend Yale had to be scrapped.

Overcoming the shame and consequences of having an alcoholic father, Arnold used his family connections, innate skills, and business acumen to make a fortune in business. He repurchased the family's home, which had been sold to repay his father's debts, later reselling it at a substantial profit and purchasing three ships with the proceeds. His venture as a sea-faring merchant played an important role in making him the man that history describes. Although he made a lot of money, he resented the harsh taxes imposed on his lucrative trade. Seeing the tyranny and greed of the British Crown, he became a devoted patriot who fought for American liberty.

James Kirby Martin, history professor at the University of Houston, writes that Arnold "began in 1775 as the most ardent of patriots." Having little tolerance for the undisciplined and undersupplied Colonial troops, he offered his own money and time to train them. In early May 1775, fighting alongside Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys, Arnold seized Fort Ticonderoga from the British. Although a relatively small conflict, it was the first American victory of the Revolutionary War, opening access to Canada and the Hudson River Valley, as well as providing the Continental Army with desperately needed ammunition, arms, and other materiel.

The following month, Arnold and his men invaded Quebec. They traveled 350 miles through rain, snow, and ice and were reduced to eating candles, dogs, and shoe leather. In addition, in the fighting, he received the first of three severe leg wounds. Although they lost the battle, the march through the Maine wilderness earned Arnold the undying respect of his men and the nickname "America's Hannibal."

After recovering from his wound, his experience with shipping led to being appointed to head the new American naval fleet, tasked with preparing to confront an expected British invasion from Montreal. When he assumed command, there were shortages in guns, food, sailors, shipbuilders, and construction materials, but as experienced sailors and shipbuilders arrived from the other colonies, Arnold eventually assembled an armada of sixteen ships.

The British attacked with more than fifty of their own vessels. Arnold strategically positioned his smaller crafts in a narrow and rocky channel to

minimize the British advantages. The Americans fought valiantly and even earned some early success, but as the battle wore on, the British superior firepower proved too great an advantage. As darkness fell, the British drew back and planned to destroy the remaining ships in the early morning hours. But General Arnold had different plans. That night he and his men attempted a daring escape by sailing right through the line of British ships! Wrapping their oars in cloth to lessen the sounds they made, one by one they sailed past the British, aided by a dense fog and inadequate British sentries.

Despite the Americans healthy head start, the British quickly gained on them. Arnold countered by bringing his ships into a rocky body of water where the larger British ships could not follow, stripped them of anything of value, and set them ablaze. Although he technically lost the battle, the rapidly approaching winter forced the British to retreat to Canada and postpone their attack until the following spring. The delay afforded Washington's army time to strengthen and resupply.

The British advanced out of Canada in the following spring, and that fall, British General John Burgoyne attacked the American forces at Saratoga, New York. A heated disagreement over strategy led American General Horatio Gates to strip Arnold of his command and ordered him to remain in his tent during the battle. But Arnold ignored the order, mounted his horse, and led the troops into battle. His brave actions rallied the men, forcing the British to retreat and ultimately to surrender almost 6,000 of their soldiers!

Major Henry Dearborn called the battle "one of the Greatest battles that Ever was fought in America." Without Arnold's actions, in which he suffered yet another devastating leg wound, the results could have been catastrophic for the patriots. Commenting on his lost battle, Burgoyne later admitted that "it was [Arnold's] doing."

Despite Arnold's disobedience, Congress promoted him to the rank of Major General. While Arnold's injury effectively ended his fighting career, the results of the battle encouraged the French to ally with the colonists, and their assistance helped to change the course of history.

We have seen some of Benedict Arnold's strengths. Next time, we will look at the unfortunate weaknesses that changed his role in history from America's hero to its villain and consider the lessons that can be learned from his tragic about-face.

- John Reiss

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

From the Archives: Featured Article

[In the Grip of Distrust](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Most are aware of a phenomenon that too often takes place within the church of God: If an attitude or trend develops in the world, we can expect it will soon enter the church. Society today struggles under an attitude of deep distrust for institutions and leaders. John Ritenbaugh explains that, in the church, this attitude has led to an increase of independent Christians, a situation contrary to the concept of unity in the Body of Christ.

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