

Born to Win

The Law of Liberty

by Ronald L. Dart

When Israel settled into the Promised Land, they enjoyed a time of freedom like few people have *ever* enjoyed in the history of the world. But I don't think very many people understand or appreciate the foundation of that freedom and what it took to maintain it. It wasn't just a matter of God handing them everything on a silver platter. They had to fight for the land, they had to fight for their freedom, and they had to work like the devil for their prosperity. But none of that would have worked without the *foundation* of freedom.

Israel was given a Law and a system of worship that was designed to maintain the Law, to implant the Law in their national memory, and to shape the national conscience. Moses (in his last speech, I think it was, to Israel) made some statements I think that are worth remembering. It's in Deuteronomy 4, verse 23, where he said:

Deuteronomy 4

AKJV

²³ Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, which the LORD your God has forbidden you.

²⁴ For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

²⁵ When you shall beget children, and children's children, and you shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD your God, to provoke him to anger:

²⁶ I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto you go over Jordan to possess it; you shall not prolong your days on it, but shall utterly be destroyed.

Now, probably the common assumption here is that there will be some supernatural curse on Israel—that, “Well, if you go serving these other idols, I'm going to come down there and I'm going to zap you.” Well, not necessarily. The national *rot* that would set in would take care of the whole thing. Now, later, in this same speech by Moses, he had this to say:

Deuteronomy 6

AKJV

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

⁵ And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

⁶ And these words, which I command you this day, shall be in your heart: [*You have to internalize them.*]

⁷ And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.

⁸ And you shall bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

⁹ And you shall write them on the posts of your house, and on your gates.

They are to be *everywhere*, and in your heart, and in your mind. Now, there are two *very big* things here. One is the danger of idolatry and the natural result of idolatry in the decay of the moral fabric of the people. The other is the Law of God—not the legalistic sense, but in the moral sense of a lamp to your feet and a light to your path; in the sense of building character in a people. The truth is that it's the first of these two things—the system of worship—that is the more crucial of the two. The reason is that it is the system of worship that draws people back to God when they've gone astray.

One of the most classic examples of this you'll find in the Bible is when the division took place between Israel and Judah. The northern tribes of Israel, led by King Jeroboam, did away with all of the sacred times of God—with the holy days, the holidays, that the Jews had always observed. He changed everything, because he said to himself, "If I don't, when these people go back down to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles..."

1 Kings 12

AKJV

²⁷ [...] then shall the heart of this people turn again to their lord, even to [the house of David], and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.

So he changed it all. And the result was that, throughout the history of these two kingdoms—the house of Judah and the house of Israel—that Judah had more than one important national revival. And these national revivals were actually fixed upon these religious observances. The ten northern tribes had no revival in their entire history.

Almost everyone misunderstands the Law. They misunderstand both aspects of the Law: the ceremonial and the moral. They take off from the legalistic assumptions of the strictest Jewish sects, and position themselves both for and against the law. "If I keep the law", one idea goes, "God will bless me and save me." "If I break the law, God will curse me and will hate you." Both ideas are *dead wrong* about the Law. Another common mistake: "Well, I keep the Law, not because I have to, but because I love God. It will make God happy if I keep the Law." Now that makes three ideas that are all *dead wrong*.

I'm going to ask you to put these ideas into a little box, tie a ribbon around it, and put it on the shelf for this half-hour. You can always go back to it later, if you want to. But right now, I want us to take a look at a *different* idea. The idea finds expression in the letter that James wrote in the New Testament. He is writing to people who...oh, they have a form of religion; they have a way of doing things; but they really, somehow in their heart of hearts, don't get it. He writes to them and says:

James 1

AKJV

²² But be you doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

It's not good enough to go to church and hear the Bible read. You've got to begin to *do* the things you hear.

James 1

KJ2000

²³ For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror:

²⁴ For he beholds himself, and goes his way, and immediately forgets what manner of man he was.

²⁵ But whoever looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues in it, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

Now, what does James mean by this expression, “the perfect law of liberty”? How, and in what way, is the Law of God a law of liberty? For I can assure you that the idea of liberty is not in that little box we just put on the shelf.

Now, let me illustrate the principles involved in the perfect law of liberty. Toward the end of the conquest of Canaan by Joshua and Israel, right at the beginning of this beautiful period of freedom that Israel enjoyed, they made *a serious mistake*. It turns out that they had not done the job that God had told him to do coming into the land.

Judges 2

AKJV

¹ And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you to the land which I swore to your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.

“I’ve kept my side of the bargain. But I also said this:”

Judges 2

AKJV

² And you shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; you shall throw down their altars: but you have not obeyed my voice: why have you done this?

Israel just *had* to get these people out of there. God *told* them to do it. They didn’t do it. The angel continues:

Judges 2

KJ2000

³ Therefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

“I’m not going to do it for you. You didn’t have the stomach to do it, so you get to live with the results.”

Judges 2

AKJV

⁴ And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. [*Because they knew that they had done wrong.*]

⁵ And they called the name of that place Bochim [בְּכִיִּם, *Strong’s H1066; which means, in Hebrew, the weepers*]: and they sacrificed there to the LORD.

⁶ And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man to his inheritance to possess the land.

⁷ And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.

And in those early days—those early years of the period of judges—Israel was more free than they had ever been, and more free than they would ever be again.

Now, why was that so? Well, they maintained two things intact. One: the worship of God at his appointed times. People often refer to them as the “Jewish holy days”. They are God’s festivals that he appointed. Second: They taught their children the laws—the underpinnings—for a civil society. They understood (and it’s something that people seem to be losing grip on, today) living free requires character. In turn, character requires an internalized morality based upon divinely-revealed absolutes. The morality that undergirds the character of a free people has to be based on *a higher authority*. If we base it on *our own* authority—under the rubric of...well, values (“We have values.”) we can change our values like we change our socks.

Think about it. When our schools teach sex education, where can they go to tell the schools what is right and what is wrong? Actually, it’s almost as though the schools *shrink* from the idea of right and wrong. If human beings (be they teachers or judges or Congress) can decide our values for us, they can change them any time they want to. The assumption being *there is no eternal truth*. That’s why our Declaration of Independence states that the source of our rights is the Creator, not the King. It was this presumption that made our liberty *possible*. But the Creator makes certain demands as a part of that guarantee.

Judges 2

AKJV

⁸ And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old.

⁹ And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash.

¹⁰ And also all that generation were gathered to their fathers [*a nice way of saying they all died*]: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

Now, how on earth was this possible. Another generation arose, right after this one that died, who did not even know God or had ever heard of what he’d done. Well, how it was possible is simple: They didn’t maintain the system of worship, and they didn’t teach their children the Law.

Judges 2

AKJV

¹¹ And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

¹² And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves to them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

¹³ And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

¹⁴ And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

Their freedom was so short-lived; one generation was all it took. Ashtaroth (also known as Astarte) can probably take credit for that. They delicately call her in the textbooks a “fertility goddess”. What she was, in all her manifestations, was a sex goddess. She is the most powerful of all the pagan gods and goddesses. All the nations of the Middle East; they all had unique male gods. One might have served Baal, another one Dagon, another one this god or that God, but *all of them* had the same female goddess: Ashtaroth (or Astarte). And so isn’t that interesting? No matter where you go, you find her influence pervasive. The whole area we call Palestine was *littered* with figurines of this goddess—usually bare-breasted, and often holding her breasts in her hands. She is not worshipped by name in our

society today; but she is worshiped, nonetheless. Our society is *consumed* with sex. They say they can't teach religion in the schools, but they are busy supporting one of the oldest religions known to man: Ashtaroth, Astarte, the goddess of sex. Our children bow at her feet.

Now, we have to think carefully about what happened to Israel. Yes, God sold them into the hands of their enemies, but there were few men among them that had the stomach for *standing up* to their enemies any longer. I remember something Winston Churchill said as a result of what he learned in the Second World War. It's in his *remarkable* history of that time, *The Gathering Storm*. He said this:

Still, if you will not fight for the right when you can easily win without bloodshed; if you will not fight when your victory will be sure and not too costly; you may come to the moment when you will have to fight with all the odds against you and only a precarious chance of survival. There may even be a worse case. You may have to fight when there is no hope of victory, because it is better to perish than to live as slaves.

Winston Churchill - The Second World War, Vol. 1: The Gathering Storm

There's every indication that Israel had lost that desire to live free. As Thomas Jefferson said, "the tree of liberty is watered with the blood of every generation." Now, if I read Judges correctly, we will *always* have enemies. If you think there's going to be a time when everybody in the world loves us, you're dreaming. We will *always* have enemies. And if we lose the law of liberty, we will lose the character required to stand before those enemies. Now, Israel lost all this, but Judges tells us:

Judges 2

AKJV

¹⁶ Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

¹⁷ And yet they would not listen to their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, [...]

Which is a very appropriate way of putting it, when you understand who was behind it all.

Judges 2

KJ2000

¹⁷ [...] and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so.

¹⁸ And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for the LORD had compassion [*He was sorry for them.*] because of their groanings because of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

¹⁹ And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.

And that is just the way it is. Liberty, you see, has its own way, and it has its price. Time passed, and this *terrible* cycle repeated itself over and over again. And, finally, in the days of one of the best of the judges, the people just had had all they could bear, and they could see the cycle was going to repeat itself one more time. This is found in 1 Samuel, chapter eight.

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

- ¹ And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel.
- ² Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beersheba.
- ³ And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre [*That's after money.*], and took bribes, and perverted judgment.

And, you know, you have to kind of understand that when a man gets old even the best of us don't have the energy, the drive, or what it takes to stay on top of sons that are going to go the wrong way. And Samuel—being busy, I guess—going up and down the circuit that God had given him to minister to the people, never paid the attention he needed to to his own sons.

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

- ⁴ Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel to Ramah,
- ⁵ And said to him, Behold, you are old, and your sons walk not in your ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.

Well, Samuel didn't like the sound of that, and he prayed to the Lord.

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

- ⁷ And the LORD said to Samuel, Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you: for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

You see, up until this time, *God* had been the king over Israel. And he was a king that ruled with a very light hand. He didn't intervene very much. He didn't bother them very much. He didn't sit on their shoulders all the time and tell them, "Do this.", and, "Do that." They had *maximum freedom*. They knew how to live their lives. They had been told. They had been given a Law. They had been given a ceremonial system, a Law, and a system of worship; they should have been able to hold on to everything without God *doing something* or telling them about it every time they turned around. So he let them do what they wanted to do.

Well, the result of that was everything came apart for them. And now they want a *real* king. He said, "They're doing the same thing, which they've done":

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

- ⁸ [...] since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, with which they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also to you.
- ⁹ Now therefore listen to their voice: however, yet protest solemnly to them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.

"I want you to show them where this is going to lead." No people *ever* had a better chance at living free. *No one* ever had a better deal. Every family was led by its elder, as was every tribe. Problems were settled right where the problem arose. People gave their word and they kept it. They were men of *courage* who would fight for their families. But all this was based on *a deal* they had made with Jehovah, their God. And that deal included a system of worship at appointed times and a law that outlined the morality of civil society. And it was that law that would have given them the *backbone* to

stand up. When they ran off after Astarte, they became morally and spiritually castrated. The evidence for this is shot through Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

So Samuel gathered the people together, and he told them, “This is how it’s going to be with this king that’s going to reign over you.”

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

¹¹ [...] He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots.

Now, if you don’t know anything about ancient warfare, you probably would be unaware of the fact that horses were never used as instruments of agriculture in these days. They were strictly for war and for fighting, as were chariots. And, of course, these men who were going to ride—horsemen—were going to be warriors; they’re cavalry. And the men running *before* his chariots were infantry. “So he’s going to take your sons, he’s going to institute a draft, and he’s going to put all your kids into his armies.”

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

¹² And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots.

¹³ And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers.

¹⁴ And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive groves, even the best of them, and give them to his servants.

You know, I honestly believe that when the Founding Fathers put together the Constitution of the United States, they were trying to prevent this sort of thing from happening. There is a constitutional amendment which says you can’t take a man’s property away from him, without just compensation, unless it is for the public good. Nowadays, they have expanded that *so much* that who knows what they can take away from you next. But they can just simply walk up to you, hand you a piece of paper, and take your property *away from you*.

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

¹⁵ And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants.

¹⁶ And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your best young men, and your asses, and put them to his work.

¹⁷ He will take the tenth of your sheep: and you shall be his servants.

You know, I wish we could kind of go back to that deal, because the government is taking a whole lot more than a tenth of us these days. But this is exactly the same thing we’re going through. Then he said this:

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

¹⁸ And you shall cry out in that day because of your king which you shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day.

So after he got through speaking, the people said, “Nope, we’re going to have a king.”

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

²⁰ That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

Now, at long last, the truth comes out. They had finally become unmanned by living without God. That line, “that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles”, is enough to *make you weep*. And it’s a spirit that pervades our society today: “Let the government do it!” Worse, “Let the government pay for it!”, forgetting that the government is paying for it with *our money*. Still worse, “Let the government fight our battles!”, forgetting it’s the blood of *our* sons and *our* daughters that will pay the bill. Did they think the king would go out alone? Did they think that he would go out single-handedly and fight all these battles while they stayed at home and drank their wine and ate their food and got fat?

You know, I read the memoirs of Tommy Franks, titled *American Soldier*. And, you know, he’s a man who is cut from the same mold as a Joshua or a Gideon. He’s a man who loves your sons and daughters and understands, more than most in Congress do, the price that has to be paid for liberty. He’s a fighting man who has stood in the forefront of battles and knows what it takes to fight and to win.

But now, when we faced the test of our generation, enlistments in the army are down sharply. There are two reasons for this. One: We have killed off most of the generation from which those men and women would have come. Some *40 million Americans* were destroyed before they ever got the breath of life. And they’re not going to be here to pay Social Security, and they won’t be here to fight to defend their country. Second: The political leadership of our country simply can’t get their act together. They are so consumed with grasping after power that they can’t restrain themselves in criticizing the war. They say they support the troops, and then demoralize them by poor-mouthing the cause for which they are fighting. And it’s not the troops who are fighting they’re affecting; it’s the ones who might join and fight in the future.

Well, they’re being able to say that and speak that way as part of our liberty, but it is a costly exercise when we can’t *learn how to disagree*. There are too many of our people giving aid and comfort to the enemy because they have been seduced by other gods. They’ve been unmanned by sex, by drink, and by drugs, and now they are unmanning a generation of young people who might fight for them and for their grandchildren, someday. It all begins with abandoning God and with driving God out of the schools and the courthouses. There are those who argue that Christian people should shut up about politics. I don’t think Christian people should shut up about *anything*. There are those who want to shove the Christian faith out of the public square. I think question should shove their way *right back into* the public square.

The day when the Israelites gave this answer to Samuel was one of the saddest days in the history of the world. It was the day when a great nation, under God, laid down their liberty. Until next time, I’m Ronald Dart.

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