

## 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.

**I**N 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.]

**A**CCORDING 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

King, he hates the Queen still more.”

Within France, the Illuminati and Jacobin Clubs contributed the leadership of the revolution. Did they qualify as true champions of liberty? Did they compare in any meaningful way with such American leaders as George Washington, Patrick Henry, or James Madison? [Encourage discussion and comparisons.]

**V**ICTIMS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION included the King and Queen, nobles, clergymen, the rising middle class, peasants, and farmers. The revolutionaries were comprised of hired killers, local criminals, and power-seeking conspirators. Louis XVI had no quarrel with the majority of his subjects, nor they with him. In fact, he had expressed the hope of becoming a “great reformer” and the champion of his people.

Unlike the English king of colonial America, Louis did react in anger or with vengeance when the people presented their petitions and grievances. He instigated a program of reform during the first year of his reign, abolishing forced labor on public works (a hated policy that dated back to feudal days). He struck down the practice of imprisoning individuals on the basis of unproven charges. He outlawed the use of torture during interrogation, called for the abolition of unusually burdensome taxation, and urged greater freedom of the press. and espoused the admission of citizens from all ranks to every category of employment. He founded hospitals, established schools, reformed the law, built canals, drained marshes, and constructed bridges. He also set a personal example of strict economy, on one occasion contributing the royal silver to the national treasury to avert a financial crisis.

The conspirators who sought to seize power from the King realized that the general population would have to be tricked into opposing him. To achieve that objective, they launched a campaign of lies and terror against the royal family.

One of their most successful ploys was the creation of an artificial famine. The production and distribution of grain was a state monopoly, a policy that that Louis XVI tried to change several times because it was inefficient and prone to graft. It was also a situation that led to periodic shortages. The conspirators seized the opportunity to

spread rumors of a pending famine.

It was true that a fearful hailstorm in July of 1788 had destroyed many of the crops around Paris, creating talk of scarcity. But it is equally true that the Duc d’Orleans began buying up grain and either sending it out of the country or hiding it to aggravate the situation. As the people began to feel the pinch, rumors circulated that there was plenty of grain, but that it was being earmarked for the King, his court, the aristocrats, and the rich who would feast in plenty while everyone else starved. Understandably angered by the (false) rumors that bread was being withheld from them, peasant mobs were easily led to destroy whatever grain they could find rather than have it remain in the hands of the rich. Sacks of corn were flung into rivers; wagonloads of wheat on their way to the Paris market were dumped and destroyed. As a consequence, farmers and corn merchants, fearing that their grains (which meant their incomes) would be destroyed in transit, hesitated to release them.

By such artificial and malicious means was the fictitious famine created.

Time and time again, manipulation of the food supply was employed as a tool to instigate mob action. For example, prior to the “hunger march” to the King’s palace at Versailles [Ver-sigh], bread was again in short supply. To create the shortage, flour was stolen from bakery shops and grain was pillaged from convoys coming into the city.

A rumor was also spread that the flour had become spoiled. The story was readily believed, since much of the flour that had arrived from foreign market differed in color and flavor from the homegrown variety. The people were persuaded to rip open sacks of the “bad” flour and dump their contents. No less than 2,000 sacks were thrown

#### FOR SERIOUS STUDENTS

This lesson barely touches the surface of the French Revolution and the conspirators who directed it. The Illuminati, of which the Duc d’Orleans was a member, is examined in depth by historian Nesta Webster in *The French Revolution*, where she quotes extensively from French writers of the revolutionary era. This important book is out-of-print, but copies may be available in public libraries or from used bookstores.



into the Seine [Sane], the principal Parisian river.

Such diabolical methods had the desired effect of creating a real famine and driving the poor of Paris to desperation.

Hunger, as the conspirators well knew, is apt to make one light-headed. Its dizzying spell can make many things seem plausible that a well-nourished brain would readily recognize as absurd. Many half-famished Frenchmen believed the false propaganda that the King, the Queen, and the aristocrats were to blame for the food shortages. The situation was ripe for a mob to be assembled and sent marching on behalf of goals predetermined by the revolutionary manipulators.

But hunger was not the only weapon wielded to entice normally law-abiding citizens to plunder and kill. The conspirators also used liquor, the promise of gold, and a trained crew of criminals and thugs. Next week we will continue our study of the French Revolution and its destructive results.

### **Concluding Thought**

The terms that most accurately describe the French Revolution are lies, deceit, trickery, and murder. The people as a whole did not achieve the freedom and opportunities had been promised by the power-seeking revolutionary leaders. The conspirators knew how to produce the anarchy that would lead to a transfer of power by setting the people against their King. The only similarity between this terrorist French Revolution and the bona fide American Revolution is that they occurred in the same century. In all other major respects the French upheaval of 1789 was comparable to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and similar power-seeking uprisings against established government.

### **DURING THE WEEK**

Make a copy of the following "time line" and post it on the family bulletin board, by the telephone, or near the dinner table where all family members can see it. Urge that the dates be memorized, or use the "time line" as a quiz.

- 1774.... Reign of Louis XVI begins
- 1775.... American Revolution begins
- 1776.... Declaration of Independence signed
- 1781.... American Revolution ends
- 1788.... U.S. Constitution adopted