

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



