

God's Hand On America: The Civil War

By Dr. Paul Norcross, CE.D

The other night I caught a history channel piece on the surrender of Robert E. Lee and the Confederate forces in 1865. I was amazed at how God intervened to save our nation. He worked in many ways, but this one caught my attention, and I thought you would be as intrigued as I was.

It seems that the Confederates were on the run, starving and weary. Hounded by General Grant, General Lee's forces got boxed in, and were weary with starvation. A few days before arriving at Appomatox, Lee's men passed through a creek valley. I was only half listening to the program until I heard the name of the valley. But hearing the name caused me to sit bolt upright. Four years ago I passed through this town as I was traveling to Smith Mountain Lake, VA to do a seminar on how to walk by the Spirit in your marriage. My wife Rita and I were enjoying the ride from the airport with Sherri, a precious sister in the Lord. The road took us through a low lying section of road next to a creek, bounded by steeply sloping banks on the other side. As we entered the section, I heard the sound of many anguishing cries in my spirit. I asked Sherri what had happened at that place, and she answered that it had been the scene of a gruesome slaughter of Confederate troops. It was as the cry of innocent blood that the Lord heard when Abel was killed by Cain, and his blood cried out from the ground (Genesis 4:10).

I had heard this once before in Romania with Brother Carl Fox as we passed a cemetery of martyrs from that country's revolution of 1989. Travelling through the creek valley, we prayed and broke the curse of shedding innocent blood. At the time, I didn't know what specifically had happened. But listening to the television historical explanation, I realized that the weary, starving Confederates were trapped and no quarter was given in that battle. Thus the ethics changed from warfare and the capture of prisoners to a merciless shedding of innocent blood in that skirmish.

But back to the story of 1865. General Lee and General Grant agreed to talk about surrender terms. President Lincoln told Grant to let them off easy, so Grant gave them these terms: promise to never again take up arms in rebellion against the United States, and you can go home to your farms and families, and even vote in the next election. Lee was relieved and pleased. No war crimes tribunals, or vengeance. Remember, the rest of the confederate forces under Johnston were being pursued by scorched-earth General Sherman. But despite his reputation, Sherman gave Johnston similar generous surrender terms some weeks later.

Lee was being pressured by his own troops as well as confederate President Jefferson Davis to authorize breaking the confederate forces into small bands to continue fighting. He considered this carefully, but with the generous terms of the surrender, Lee was a man of honor and adamantly refused to sanction what would have become guerilla warfare -- somewhat of a first in modern warfare. This would have resulted in continuing war for decades. Can you imagine what that would have done to our

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country? It was hard enough to heal during the Reconstruction. But splintered guerilla fighting would have lasted for years, and scarred many generations.

The North hated Lincoln for the draft, and for being too soft on the South. The South hated him for being too emancipating to the slaves. Shortly after Lee's surrender, Lincoln delivered a speech in which he gave two clear messages: first, that black soldiers in the war and educated civilian blacks would be able to vote; second that there would be no Union vendettas against the South for their rebellion.

There was an angry man in the crowd who heard this speech. His name was John Wilkes Booth. Booth was a noted stage actor of the day, and Lincoln was even among his fans. But Booth was an angry anti-government conspirator who determined after that speech to carry out a previously contemplated assassination of not only Lincoln, but also William Seward, the Secretary of War, and Vice President Johnson.

Within a night or two, God warned Lincoln in a dream. Lincoln arose from his bed in the middle of the night to walk the White House, winding up in the East Room where he observed a body laid out in state. "Who is this?" he asked the Lord. The Lord replied that it was "The President, the President." Lincoln was troubled, but a few nights later went to Ford's Theater with his wife. Evidently he didn't realize the significance of the dream, because that night he gave the night off to his trusted and capable bodyguard, and instead got some stand-in who fell down on the job.

Booth crept into the presidential box seat and waited for the anticipated high volume laughter response to a line in the play, and shot the president under cover of the noise. Meanwhile, the man attacking William Seward stole into his house and knifed several sleeping family members until finally arriving at Seward's bedroom. Seward was knifed five times, but because he was in a metal neck brace from a bad carriage accident that day, the neck brace saved him from what would have been the fatal thrust. Andrew Johnson's murderer chickened out, and Johnson was sworn in as President some days later.

Booth's purpose was to upset the functioning of the Union government, and Johnson was firmly for retribution against the South. In fact, Johnson and the Congress were furious with Sherman's negotiated peace with Johnston, which occurred many days after Lee's surrender, but which followed similarly generous terms. The news of Sherman's peace agreement arrived in Washington close on the heels of Lincoln's death. Johnson ordered a reversal of Sherman's peace with Johnston, and sent General Grant to meet with Sherman to make sure it was re-negotiated.

So now the stage was set for the North to seek vengeance against the South. The angry North and their powerful newspaper journalists clamored for revenge. The South, already angry with the surrender and the carnage of General Sherman's march through the southern states, and the loss of their dreams of victory in the war, were poised for fighting on. In fact, Jefferson Davis, the Confederate President now in hiding, was fully for continuing to fight in the small guerilla bands. But the real power broker was Lee.

He was revered among his troops. All it would take was for him to give the word, and the entire South would cheerfully keep going for (fading) glory.

Lee saw the never ending devastation that small-band, leaderless fighting would cause. He wrote instead, urging the South to become good citizens of a United States. His decisive words went against all prevailing opinion, North and South. Had it not been for the Godly decision of Lincoln, Grant and Lee, and Sherman and Johnston, for leniency instead of revenge, it is likely that we might be living in the kind of instability that characterizes many tribal/politically factioned countries today. **We need to see this spiritual reality which fully governs political and social dynamics in every culture:** The curse of shedding innocent blood never leaves a land or a people until repentance is done by those in spiritual authority (which comes through bloodline, civil, and religious authority), and the curses are broken.

The decision of these men to let the grace and peace of God rule reminded me a lot of King Rehoboam's reign after Solomon in I Kings 12. Solomon had fallen into witchcraft. The end of his reign was brutal on the people, and his son was advised by Solomon's aged counselors to go easy on the populace. But instead, Rehoboam took the counsel of his younger team, who advised being even more severe than his father had been. This caused the nation to split into two nations: Israel and Judah. The United States might never have regained unity as a nation had the Godly decisions of Lincoln and the four generals not been heeded. The devil came very close to continuing the bloodshed that was destroying this land, a nation that God had founded on principles of spiritual liberty, with Jesus Christ as its primary advisor.

It is awesome to see the hand of God in the affairs of men and women who honor Him. May our leaders today continue to honor Jesus Christ in all they think, do and say, that our land may receive the blessings of His divine favor. May we be blessed to have a professing, committed Christian leader and very Godly first lady in office. Without God's wisdom, we will surely split apart the same way as Israel did under Rehoboam. As Ben Franklin proclaimed when he saw the need to kick-start the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia one very hot summer day some 70 years earlier,

"At the beginning of our War for Independence, we had daily prayers in this room for divine protection. Our prayers were heard, and they were graciously answered. Have we now forgotten this powerful Friend? Do we think we no longer need His assistance?"

"I have lived a long time. And the longer I live, the more I am convinced that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? Without the Lord, we shall fare no better than the builders of Babel. We shall be divided by our little, local interest. We shall become a reproach to future ages."

Franklin went on to formally motion that each session to craft the United States constitution begin with prayer. The convention immediately declared three days of prayer and fasting to break the deadlocked wrangling that had characterized the several months of effort invested thus far. When they reconvened, the Constitution came together, birthed out of the spiritual authority and unity from God's hand of blessing. This constitution became the standard for all free nations ever since.

Sometimes a history lesson causes our eyes to glaze over. But consider the hand of God, and what He did to intervene in the affairs of believing men and women at crucial times for the United States. In every nation where people arise to hear and obey the voice of the Lord, spiritual liberty will grow.

May the men and women of every nation continue to stand against the tide of popular opinion, and govern their hearts instead on God's wisdom. May we devote ourselves to dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, under the shadow of the Almighty by learning to seek Him fervently as our first pursuit in life. Jesus Christ is the King, whom we serve as we seek to do the Father's will. If indeed a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that you can rise to do His will without His aid today?

All glory to the One from Whom all blessings flow,

Paul Norcross