



Washington at the Battle of Monongahela, 1755

## **THE PATTERN OF DIVINE INTERVENTION - PT 3**

### ***THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION INTERVENTION***

*By David Schnittger*

The Bible presents Yahweh God as both transcendent and immanent. By transcendent, we mean that He stands beyond and is unaffected in His essential being by the circumstances of earth and the universe. By immanent, we mean that He is, at the same time, concerned and intimately involved in the affairs of this universe, and, in particular, with mankind. As such, God has chosen to be responsive to man's actions, whether judging and punishing sin and unbelief, or granting merciful intervention in response to man's repentance and faith. It is the latter subject that we are exploring in this series of articles. We have already looked at the Exodus intervention under Moses as well as the Babylonian Captivity intervention under King Cyrus. We have also dealt with the Nineveh intervention under the prophet Jonah.

In this chapter, we are going to examine the divine intervention that took place during the American Revolution, specifically during 1775-1781. This amazing revolution pitted colonial farmers against the mightiest military force of its day - the British empire! As per the previous divine interventions that we have already looked at, this intervention also involved an unlikely individual, George Washington.

## THE PREPARATION OF THE DELIVERER

The preparation of George Washington began many years prior to the Revolutionary War. As a young man, Washington was involved in the French and Indian War, fighting on the side of the British. A noteworthy incident took place during the Battle of Monongahela, on July 9, 1755. During this particular incident, the British forces, under the command of General Edward Braddock, was ambushed by Indians. The British forces were decimated and General Braddock was killed. The 23-year old Colonel Washington had two horses shot out from under him and four musket balls passed through his coat, yet he emerged unscathed. Writing of this incident to his brother, Jack, Washington wrote: "Death was leveling my companions on every side of me, but by the all-powerful dispensations of Providence, I have been protected."

Fifteen years after this battle, Washington and his life-long friend, Dr. Craik, were exploring wilderness territory in the Western Reserve. Near the junction of the Kanawha and Ohio Rivers, a band of Indians came to them with an interpreter. The leader of the band was an old and venerable chief, who wished to have words with Washington. A council fire was kindled, and this is what the chief said:

I am a chief and ruler over my tribes. My influence extends to the waters of the great lakes, and to the far Blue Mountains. I have traveled a long and weary path, that I might see the young warrior of the great battle. It was on the day when the white man's blood mixed with the streams of our forest, that I first beheld this chief. I called to my young men and said, "Mark yon tall and daring warrior? He is not of the red-coat tribe—he hath an Indian's wisdom and his warriors fight as we do - himself alone is exposed. Quick let your aim be certain, and he dies." Our rifles were leveled, rifles which, but for him, knew not how to miss . . . 'Twas all in vain; a power mightier far than we shielded him from harm. He cannot die in battle. I am old, and soon shall be gathered to the great council fire of my fathers in the land of shades, but ere I go, there is something that bids me speak in the voice of prophecy: Listen! The Great Spirit protects that man, and guides his destinies—he will become the chief of nations, and a people yet unborn will hail him as the founder of a mighty empire.<sup>1</sup>

## THE PREPARATION OF THE PEOPLE

The tensions between England and her American colonies had been building for a long time prior to the Declaration of Independence in 1776. The tensions began after the French and Indian War, when England barred her growing colonies from settling lands beyond the Allegheny Mountains; when Britain levied taxes on her colonies but failed to seat their representatives in Parliament; when Americans were forced to "quarter" English troops in their homes. The Boston Tea Party of 1774 further fueled the cries for independence. The British attacks on Americans in New England, beginning in April, 1775, inevitably led to a formal declaration of independence by the colonists in July, 1776. The famous Declaration of Independence, passed unanimously by the thirteen colonies on July 4, 1776 was a formal declaration of grievances against King George and the British government. Based upon these unresolved grievances, these 56 colonial representatives declared the united colonies to be "FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES." Upon this declaration each of

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<sup>1</sup>William Johnson, *George Washington, the Christian*, 41-42.

these signers “. . . mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.” That pledge was soon to be put to the test.

## THE WAR

The French and Indian War provided excellent preparation for the trials and tests Washington was to face in the Revolutionary War. When Washington was chosen by the Continental Congress to lead the Continental army in the summer of 1775, the changes in attitude and conduct of the army changed rapidly and dramatically. The day after Washington formally took command, the following general order was issued:

The General most earnestly requires and expects a due observance of those articles of war established for the government of the army which forbid profane cursing, swearing and drunkenness. And in like manner, he requires and expects of all officers and soldiers not engaged in actual duty, a punctual attendance of Divine services, to implore the blessing of Heaven upon the means used for our safety and defences.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after he took command, Washington issued another order pertaining to the duty to attend Divine service. Notice that Washington expected his soldiers to be like Gideon’s men, drinking of the water watchfully, or like the Pilgrims, marching to their Sunday service with arms and ammunition in hand.

The General orders this day [July 20, the first national fast day] to be religiously observed by the forces under his Command, exactly in manner directed by the Continental Congress. It is therefore strictly enjoined of all officers and soldiers to attend Divine service. And it is expected that all those who go to worship do take their arms, ammunition and accoutrements, and are prepared for immediate action, if called upon.<sup>3</sup>



**Washington Crossing the Delaware River**

Perhaps the most severe trial of the war was in the winter of 1776, when Washington and his troops were stationed at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Conditions were brutal during that severe winter, with many soldiers unshod and starving. Washington would, on occasion, seek solitude at Valley Forge to pray for his embattled troops. Sensing the desperation of this losing effort, Washington decided upon

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Marshall, *The Light and the Glory*, 289.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

a bold plan. Washington and his men crossed the Delaware River on the night of December 25-26, 1776 in a surprise attack against the Hessian forces in Trenton, New Jersey. Washington led a column of Continental Army troops across the icy Delaware River in a logistically challenging and dangerous operation. Washington surprised and defeated the Hessian troops at Trenton, then crossed the river back to Pennsylvania laden with prisoners and military stores taken as a result of the battle.

Washington's army then crossed the river a third time a few days later, defeating British reinforcements under Cornwallis at Trenton on January 2 and his rear guard at Princeton on January 3. These bold victories turned the momentum of the war toward the colonists, and greatly enhanced the esteem in which Washington was held by the American people.



Federal Hall, New York City

## THE NEW MOSES

Because of Washington's travails and triumphs at Valley Forge, the nation's pastors were beginning to catch the spirit of the tremendous spiritual struggle that was being waged at Valley Forge. More and more sermons were likening Washington to Moses. There were obvious parallels, but there was also the similarity in his choosing to share the same hardships as his men. Pastors often quoted Hebrews 11:24-26 in this regard: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt . . ."

## THE VICTORY

When, in the Providence of God, America emerged victorious in its war against the greatest military power in the world, Washington ordered a thanksgiving service to be held the day after the surrender:

The Commander-in-chief earnestly recommends that the troops not on duty should universally attend with that seriousness of deportment and gratitude of heart which the recognition of such reiterated and astonishing interposition of Providence demands of us.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> William Johnson, *George Washington*, p. 134



Two years after the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, the peace treaty with the British was signed. Washington and his senior officers gathered at Fraunce's Tavern in Lower Manhattan for an emotional farewell luncheon. At this solemn occasion, Washington said, "With a heart full of gratitude, I now take leave of you. I most devoutly wish that your latter days be as prosperous and happy as your former ones have been glorious and honorable. I cannot come to each of you but shall feel obliged if each of you will come and take me by the hand." Shortly thereafter, Washington issued the formal resignation of his commission before Congress at Annapolis on December 23, 1783.

Washington said:

Mr. President: The great events on which my resignation depended having at length taken place; I have now the honor of offering my sincere Congratulations to Congress and of presenting myself before them to surrender into their hands the trust committed to me, and to claim the indulgence of retiring from the service of my country.

Happy in the confirmation of our Independence and Sovereignty, and pleased with the opportunity afforded the United States of becoming a respectable Nation, I resign with satisfaction to the Appointment I accepted with diffidence. A diffidence in my abilities to accomplish so arduous a task, which however was superseded by a confidence in the rectitude of our Cause, the support of the Supreme Power of the Union and the patronage of Heaven. . .

I consider it an indispensable duty to close this last solemn act of my official life by commending the interests of our dearest country to the protection of Almighty God, and of those who have superintended of them to his holy keeping. Having now finished the work assigned me, I retire from the great theatre of action and bidding affectionate farewell to this august body under whose orders I have so long acted, I here offer my commission and take my leave of all the employments of public life.

## THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION PATTERN OF DIVINE INTERVENTION

In some ways, George Washington was an unlikely person to deliver America during her struggles for Independence. He was a plantation owner, not a professional soldier. His limited war experience had taken place many years before, fighting on behalf of the British. He was of British ancestry and many of his fellow plantation owners refused to break with England. Yet, in the time of America's need, God raised up a man of faith, courage and conviction to be America's Moses. I believe we see, at this critical juncture of "history's great nation" the continuation of the pattern of divine intervention we have seen in our previous biblical narratives. Let me summarize it as follows: *A needy people cry out to God in desperation. God has respect to their cry and raises up an unlikely person, who, against the resistance of the establishment, is God's agent to affect deliverance.* In the next article, we will see if the patterns holds for the divine intervention that is taking place during the Second American Revolution.

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