

BENEDICT ARNOLD

“Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil” (Jn. 6:70).

The following information has been taken from the book “Killing England” by Bill O’Reilly. Benedict Arnold is almost as infamous in American history as Judas Iscariot is to students of the Bible. Perhaps reflecting on his treachery will provide a teachable moment in our own lives.

At 36 years of age Arnold was an officer in the Revolutionary army. He was a stocky five-foot nine military genius with coal-black hair, piercing gray eyes, and a propensity for drunkenness and rage. He was under the command of Gen. Horatio Gates who had a reputation for being indecisive with an aversion to risk. Arnold badgered him to allow him to attack the British and Hessian troops under the command of “Gentleman Johnny” Burgoyne as they were marching south from Quebec to link with the army of Gen. William Howe.

After repeated requests Gen. Gates finally authorized Arnold to command a small harassing force of several hundred sharpshooters and 300 men from the First New Hampshire Regiment. He was warned, however, that should he be overwhelmed, Gates would not risk sending in reinforcements.

It didn’t matter to Arnold. No other commander was his equal in success against the British. Even his singular defeat in 1775 in the battle of Quebec had earned him the nickname of the “American Hannibal”. Not everyone, however, felt that Arnold was a true patriot. Lt. Col. John Brown of Massachusetts had written a handbill denouncing his former commanding officer stating: “Money is this man’s God, and to get enough he would sacrifice his country”. Brown was right! And as you might guess, Arnold’s treachery also involved a woman. He had fallen madly in love with an 18-year-old blond named Peggy Shippen. Peggy came from a family prosperous enough to provide her with the latest European fashions of silk dresses and two-foot-high wigs.

Thus Arnold conspired with the British Major Andre to turn over a treasure trove of top secret intelligence designed to help Britain win the war. As Arnold haggled with Andre for more money and power, the darkness needed for his safe return to British lines was passed. And in spite of his disguise he was captured. When Arnold was aware that his treason had been discovered, he abandoned his wife and child, fled to the British, and became a brigadier general fighting his former friends. As you might suspect, he lived in constant fear that someone would betray him as he had betrayed others. After the war he moved to England. While initially considered a celebrity, his lying duplicity came back to haunt him. He was jeered in public as a money-crazed mercenary and a newspaper cartoon depicted him as a serpent. He fled to Canada for refuge but that didn’t help. Finally he returned to London where he died in poverty in 1801 at the age of sixty.

May this tragic story remind us that pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall (Prov. 16:18). When we think we are standing is when we are in danger of falling (1 Cor. 10:12). Every way of a man is right in his own eyes (Prov. 21:2). In some twisted way Judas rationalized betraying Jesus and Arnold rationalized betraying his country. In both instances the devil won the victory. When Judas committed suicide the Scriptures teach that he went to his own place (Acts 1:25). Not good! Jesus said that it would have been good for Judas if he had never been born (Mk. 14:21). Even though Benedict Arnold got a lot more than 30 pieces of silver, it was still a bad bargain. Jesus said it like this: **“What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” (Matt. 16:26).**

What about you? If you are truly interested in making a “profit”, don’t try to do it by lying and deception. God actually wants to reward those who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6). By serving God you can lay up treasure in heaven where moth and rust cannot corrupt (Matt. 6:19 - 21).