

SO MANY CHICKENS
A Devotional Meditation from
Proverbs 14:28; John 8:42-44; James 1:26-2:13
Albert J. McCarn
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What is it about the Battle of the Alamo that continues to captivate people nearly two centuries later? There is nothing glorious about preventable death, and as we have learned from history, the hundreds of battle deaths on March 6, 1836, were most certainly preventable. The final attack that morning cost the lives of some 500 men. About 200 of them were the Texan defenders, all of whom



Dawn at the Alamo, Henry McArdle, 1905, [Texas State Library and Archives Commission](#).

were killed in the fight or executed after their surrender. The senseless slaughter of the Alamo's defenders hardened Texan resolve to fight for their independence from Mexico, which they won six weeks later at the Battle of San Jacinto.

We now look upon the Alamo's defenders as heroes, and rightly so, but rarely do we consider the hundreds of Mexican soldiers who did their duty that day. At least 200 were killed, and another 300-400 wounded. Altogether, those hundreds of casualties amounted to about one-third of the Mexican army committed to the battle. That is a grim toll by any measure, but not according to their commander. The history that has come down to us indicates that General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna insisted on a final battle to capture the Alamo even though his senior officers tried to persuade him otherwise. They knew that, after nearly two weeks of siege, the Alamo could not hold out much longer. All the Mexicans had to do was wait a few days and the fortress would surrender,

But Santa Anna would have it no other way. He wanted a glorious final battle to strike fear in the hearts of the Texan rebels, encourage his own soldiers, and above all enhance his reputation as the "Napoleon of the West." When urged to spare the lives of the men, Santa Anna is said to have answered, "What are the lives of soldiers more than so many chickens? I tell you, the Alamo must fall, and my orders must be obeyed at all hazards." The next day, as he surveyed the scene of the battle, Santa Anna pointed to the dead

lying all around him and said, “These are the chickens. Much blood has been shed, but the battle is over. It was but a small affair.”*

We should be shocked at such callous disregard for life. Santa Anna was not only the commander of the Mexican army, but also the president of Mexico. His ruthless actions in Texas followed a pattern he had established in the rest of Mexico, where he brutally put down revolts against his dictatorial rule. Santa Anna’s humiliating defeat in Texas brought his removal from power, but over the next 20 years he was able to maneuver his way back into the presidency several times. His reputation as an accomplished military leader aided him in that regard, but in reality Santa Anna’s record on the battlefield was dismal. Not only did he suffer defeat after defeat at the hands of Texan and American armies in the 1840s, but his defeats cost his native Mexico dearly in blood, treasure, and territory. Finally, after agreeing to sell what is now southern Arizona to the United States in 1855 – a deal that enriched him while further humiliating his nation – the people of Mexico removed him from power for the last time.

Santa Anna’s career calls to mind the words of King Solomon:

A large population is a king’s glory, but lack of subjects is a prince’s ruin. (Proverbs 14:28 TLV)

This is the cost of putting ego above life. It matters little whether the ego thus served is that of a powerful autocrat, or a wealthy corporate executive, or a local sheriff, or even a popular ministry leader. Any alignment of personal priorities that puts self above others runs the risk of devaluing other people to the point of making them expendable. It doesn’t matter whether that expendability costs them their lives, their jobs, or even their good standing in the local garden club, exalting oneself over another person ultimately ends badly.

This has spiritual connotations that we do not like to think about. Consider the king and the prince in Solomon’s proverb. Who is the King of the Universe? It is God, our Creator and Redeemer. He is the one Who commanded our first ancestors to be fruitful and multiply, and Who urged the Hebrews under Moses to choose life. We rightly take those commands as applicable to ourselves because we are part of that same redemptive covenant that makes us the extension of our Creator in this earth. Thus, anything that enhances life glorifies our King because it amplifies His presence.

So then who is the prince who lacks subjects? And why does he lack subjects? Could it be the “prince of the power of the air,” whom we call Satan? Yes, that seems a reasonable conclusion. He does not value life. In fact, he has always sought to destroy life. It seems insane to destroy one’s own subjects, but that is the nature of evil. If the multiplication of life glorifies the Creator, then perhaps Satan has the idea that destruction of life diminishes God’s glory and enhances his own.

With that in mind, consider what Messiah Yeshua said to the religious leaders of His day:

* “The Alamo: Accounts Following the Battle – Fernando Urriza (Mexican Colonel), 1859. S. Mintz & S. McNeil, 2018. *Digital History* http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/alamo/following9.cfm), accessed February 19, 2021.

Yeshua said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for from God I came and now I am here. For I have not come on My own, but He sent Me. Why don’t you understand My speech? Because you’re not able to hear My word! You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks lies he is just being himself—for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:42-44 TLV)

That is harsh condemnation for the spiritual authorities of Israel, God’s covenant nation. And yet, the truth of that condemnation was proven in the conspiracy of those same authorities to have *Yeshua* killed.

But before we condemn those leaders, let us consider whether our Messiah’s words might apply to us as well. We have help from *Yeshua*’s brother James:

If anyone thinks he is religious and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is futile. Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

My brothers and sisters, do not hold the faith of our glorious Lord *Yeshua* the Messiah while showing favoritism. For if a man with a gold ring and fine clothes comes into your synagogue, and a poor person in filthy clothes also comes in; and you pay special attention to the one wearing the fine clothing and you say, “Sit here in a good place”; and you say to the poor person, “Stand there,” or “Sit by my footstool”; haven’t you made distinctions between yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers and sisters. Didn’t God choose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom that He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor person. Isn’t it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? Don’t they blaspheme the good name by which you were called? If, however, you fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well. But if you show favoritism, you are committing sin and are convicted by the *Torah* as transgressors. (James 1:26-2:9 TLV)

If you think these words are too harsh, remember what our Messiah taught us: that the standards of righteousness God gave through Moses and the prophets are to be kept by righteous hearts. In other words, our righteous outward deeds should be motivated by righteous inner thoughts springing from transformed hearts. Without that heart change, we remain part of the evil prince’s realm rather than the life-giving realm of our heavenly King. And if we don’t guard our hearts, our tendency will be to consider those less fortunate than ourselves as nothing more than so many chickens.