
LEGENDS, VISIONS, AND GREATNESS

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“When legends die, vision also fails; when visions end, there is no more greatness.”
(author unknown)

Mary and I discovered this quote from Native American wisdom at the Crazy Horse monument in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Many pictures of prominent Native American chiefs and some of their great wisdom appeared on a large wall in the monument hall, where you can also look out a large window to view work being done on the mountain containing the monument of Chief Crazy Horse astride his war horse. The above quote came from an introductory film there.

It’s difficult to escape the sense of power pervading the wall, since the color pictures of great chiefs done by several artists almost universally depict great strength of character and a deep-seated sadness over what eventually became of Native American legends, vision, culture, values, and leadership.

Think a minute about some powerful legends and visions of our faith. One that comes immediately to mind is that of the Exodus after 400 years of travail in Egyptian bondage. Is this legend still active in our society? Does it have visions attached to it? Or has it faded into an interesting story with no direct connection to modern society?

The original account of the Exodus was loaded with miraculous deliverance and great examples of faith, forbearance, and certitude in its leaders. The collective memory it implants in the participants and future generations is emotionally powerful since it shows them who they are and how God has actively intervened in their existence many times before. Constant repeating of the legend around campfires and in educating the young generates the vision, which is an understanding between leaders and active citizens as to how best to maintain the legend and

its application to the welfare of society. But few seem to realize that there was great meaning and intent by God in creating the circumstances surrounding the Exodus. God allowed the people to suffer sufficiently so that the memory of their ordeal would be ever fresh in their minds and would create the deep-seated resolution that these things must never occur again. So the memory of oppression created the legend of the Exodus that in turn created visions for the future of freedom and prosperity.

But the Israel people did what they were historically prone to do, and that was to conveniently forget their national memory as they grew into a great nation with power enough to oppress anyone resisting them. With no national memory of the legend of God's miraculous liberation, the visions necessary for creating a new nation based upon liberty and justice rather than control and injustice tended to slide away. The values associated with the Exodus lived for a while as our Founding Fathers built the new nation, but then were largely replaced by the new ethics of greed, conquering, military might, and imperialism---which created the confused and chaotic nation we now live in. The contrast between Exodus liberation and the new corporate oppressions taking over the nation have been lost, as has much of the national greatness that follows when Exodus values of liberty and justice are integrated into our national character.

The biblical legends supporting the grand vision of God's plan for his earthly kingdom become lost as we frantically grope for light when there is only darkness. God laid forth the operating system for his kingdom in his great Jubilee structure revealed first in Leviticus 25, then repeated through the entire Bible. But Jubilee seems relegated to the back burners of Christian preaching and teaching as we focus almost entirely on the three legs of basic Christianity: doctrinal correctness, personal piety, and sexual purity.

Today, America has a strong, vital, miraculous series of legends on the founding, building, and settling of our nation. But we gradually lose this Divine gift under our competitive system of "everybody grab what they can while they can." As we lose these legends we also begin to lose the visions as to the national greatness that is possible, but only under God's Jubilee ethics.