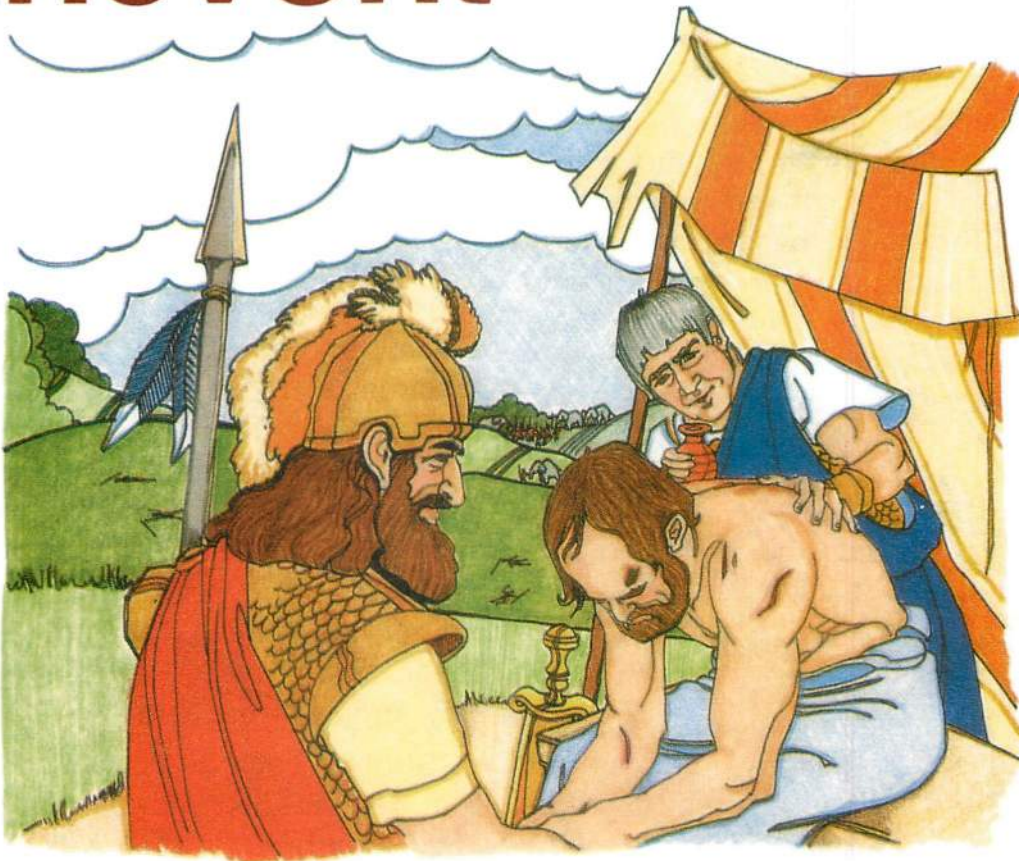


# Sts. Vartan and Ghevont



## The Battle of Avarayr: A Conversation

"I just want to give up and go back home!" sighed Aram. "There's just no way we can win."

"They're really beating us," Harootiun said, looking around at all the Armenians who lay dead or wounded on the field.

"But if we do give up, we lose everything!" Hovhannes cried.

"If we give up there will be no more Armenia and our children will be forced to worship fire and other false gods. We will lose our land, our country, our property, our language, our rights; but

most of all we will lose our souls. We will lose our share of the Kingdom of God. God will not let us inherit the Kingdom if we lose our faith in the Lord.”

“You’ve been listening to that priest, Der Ghevont!” Simon sneered. “He’s afraid he’ll be out of a job. That’s why he wants us to fight. Why should we risk our lives for him?”

“We’re risking our lives for ourselves and our families and each other, Simon,” said Michael. “And besides, didn’t you hear? Yesterday the Persians captured most of the priests including Catholicos Hovsep and Der Ghevont. Reports say they were taken far away and cruelly murdered by the Persians. They gave their lives for us. They stayed with our troops on the battlefield since the fight began. I myself saw Der Ghevont caring for our wounded and praying over the dying. He looked all worn out and could hardly stand on his feet, but he kept on moving from one soldier to another helping as much as he could.”

“So we have lost our church leaders. We have lost our military leaders including Vartan. What chance do we have now of winning? Maybe we should just give up.” Aram looked ready to collapse from exhaustion.

“If we give up, all their deaths and the deaths of our friends who fought with us will be for nothing!” Minas was gathering what little strength he had left to speak again. “My wife has been in the camp all day helping where she could. She even fought alongside me for a while. She is afraid of what will happen to our family if the Persians win this war. She doesn’t want us to live if we can’t be free Armenians who

worship the one true God. She would rather throw herself into the fire and gain eternal life than kneel before it and worship it and lose her soul. We are Christians and we don’t want to stop being Christians!”

“Why couldn’t the Persian King Hasgerd let us alone? We paid our taxes to him. We helped him fight his wars. Why does he do this to us now? We Armenians could live under Persian rule if we were allowed to keep our religion. Why does he insist we change it?” Armen was puzzled over why the Persians forced their religion on Armenia.

“Hasgerd is afraid of his gods. He doesn’t understand that there is only one true God and that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, has given us something no one can take from us. Our Lord has given us a share in his Kingdom, a life after this life which will be new and better. Hasgerd only cares about this life here and now.” Sevan put down his spear and prayed, “Lord, help us to stay strong in our faith.”

“Strong? Look at us. Only a few left. The Persians scared off many of us when they brought their elephants into the battle. Did you see how they drove the beasts into the fight and surrounded Vartan? Each elephant had spearmen on its back and the spearmen threw so many spears at us it was as if it were raining spears! When I saw Vartan get hit, my heart broke. I knew he was dead. The news of Vartan’s death spread among our troops like a sickness and many were disheartened.” Haig wiped tears from his eyes as he spoke and remembered the death of Vartan.

“Should we give up?” Aram asked.

“No,” they all said.

“Vartan’s nephew, Vahan Mamigonian, is taking our army into the mountains. There we will regroup and plan what to do next. We will not give up. We will fight until the Persians give up and let us worship the God of our forefathers, or we will die trying!” Sevan said, as he picked up his spear again.

“Let’s go,” Michael said as he helped the others gather their things together.

“Today we have lost a battle, but we will not lose this war. We will fight until we can live freely as Christians or we will die as Christians.”

“You know,” said Aram, “I’m tired and hungry and dirty and wounded, but somehow I feel good and happy now. I have seen my father and brothers die, but I feel happy. It doesn’t make sense.”

“Yes, it does,” said Minas. “The happiness you feel comes from the Lord because you have not given up your love for him.”

“Today I have killed many men,” said Aram. “I prayed that God would forgive me for taking lives. Perhaps this feeling of hope and joy is his answer to my prayers.”

“You did not kill out of hate or desire to gain something for yourself. You killed out of love of God and the desire to save your fellow Christians from being forced to give up their faith. God who judges all men will judge you fairly. He knows our fight was forced on us. Don’t despair.”

“Let’s go. Let’s find Vahan’s camp in the mountains.”

## Review Questions

1. Who was Vartan Mamigonian?
2. Who was Der Ghevont?
3. What did the Persians want the Armenians to do?
4. Why did the Armenians have to fight the Persians?
5. Who finally won the fight?



## Then and Now

In Vartan’s and Ghevont’s time another country that did not believe in God tried to impose its beliefs on the Armenian people and turn them away from the Armenian Church.

Today there are forces trying to turn us away from our faith.

Preachers from other religions try to get us to think about God the way they do, and not the way we have been taught throughout the centuries by our Armenian Church.

Advertisers try to convince us that their products will give us great happiness and that we *really* need them.

People try to tell us that anything is okay if you can get away with it.

There is a feeling of “Me First” rather than “Let’s Share.”



## Questions to Think About

Choose one and tell your classmates what you think about:

1. Having to fight and kill does not seem like a Christian thing to do. Was it right or wrong for Vartan to fight the Persians?
2. Should a person pretend to change her religion to save her life (and practice in secret?)
3. Should a person change his religion to save his life?
4. Should you move to another place to have religious freedom, or stay and fight for your right to practice your religion in your own home?
5. Should Armenians try to continue their church in this country or should they just join another church?

## Class Activity



Each year before Great Lent begins we celebrate Vartanantz Day. We remember the sacrifices of Vartan Mamigonian, Ghevont Yeretz, and all the Armenian people who kept the Armenian Church alive.

Plan a Vartanantz program for your Sunday School assembly.