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# LAKE SIDE CHURCH *of Chicago*

† transforming lives † transforming our world for Christ

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## The **LAMPLIGHTER**



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### ONE SMALL CHOICE, ONE GIANT EFFECT

Most decisions make small ripples in our ponds of life, but occasionally one decision can have a tsunami-like impact. Hannibal the Great made one such decision in 218 BC, which probably altered the face of Western civilization.

Hannibal's father, Hamilcar Barca, rose in power to become the commander of the Carthaginian army in the third century BC. The Carthage empire extended along the coast of North Africa and under Hamilcar, it acquired a large territory in the Iberian peninsula (Spain). Hamilcar drowned in battle and his son-in-law, Hasdrubal the Fair, succeeded him. Hasdrubal was assassinated in 221 BC and the army pledged their allegiance to Hannibal, confirmed by the governing powers.

Hannibal, a tactical genius, incited Rome to declare war against Carthage for a second time (the Second Punic War). In 218 BC, Hannibal set out from Cartagena in Spain to take the war to Rome. Three routes were available. He could cross the Mediterranean, but Rome controlled the sea. He could take the long land route, but this would diminish his element of surprise. The third and shorter route required crossing the Alps, a nearly impossible feat.

A brilliant tactician, Hannibal chose the impossible, setting out with 50,000 troops, 9,000 horses and pack animals and 37 elephants. He won several battles along the way and devised ingenious schemes to cross the Rhone River before reaching the Alps. The ascent proved treacherous, but the descent was worse.

With no real knowledge of the Alps, Hannibal discovered a hazardous terrain of an ice substratum hidden by mud. Men and animals could hardly remain on their feet. A snow storm compounded their journey's nightmare. But another unsuspected calamity was coiled to strike.

Trudging through the snow, mud and ice, the army suddenly stopped. Hannibal, marching at the rear, came tromping to the front, furious by the increasing delay. A large snow drift blocked their progress. Angered by the indecisiveness and determined to demonstrate that an ice base lay beneath the snow, he slammed his walking cane into the drift onto the ice.

Of the one million avalanches annually, over half of them occur in this small region. In some locations, the slightest disturbance can trigger a snowslide. Hannibal's rash action brought the mountain side down on his army. After digging out for four days, they determined that less than half of his army and even fewer animals survived.

With a will colder than the Alpine ice, Hannibal led his depleted army out of the Alps, picking up additional troops from a Gallic tribe in the region. He won two swift battles, catching the Romans completely off-guard. Rome sent a large force to engage him in Cannae, which Hannibal routed with remarkable military genius.

Knowing that he did not have the numbers to attack Rome, Hannibal sent for reinforcements. A sizeable army, led by his brother, entered Italy, but was immediately intercepted and destroyed by the waiting Romans.

Rome recognized Hannibal's superior skill in open combat and decided to allow Hannibal to wander around southern Italy without engaging him head on. Hannibal could not muster enough troops for an invasion of Rome. After ten years, the Roman general, Scipio Africanus, led an assault on Spanish territories and maneuvered his forces through North Africa, targeting Carthage. Hannibal retreated to defend Carthage and Scipio defeated him at Zama in 202 BC.

Hannibal posed the most serious threat to Rome's world dominance. Hannibal's brilliance promised to dethrone the Roman Republic before Augustus ever established the Empire 200 years later. But his impulsive temper derailed his campaign before it was out of the Alps, sending shock waves through the Alpine canyons into future generations. The Roman Empire has left the largest footprint on Western civilization. What if the Carthaginian general had severed the foot before it ever stepped into Western history? One can only imagine?

Another great leader had to learn a power transcends the genius and skills of even the greatest human leaders. Nebuchadnezzar extended Babylonian authority throughout the Middle East. God sent his prophet, Daniel, to explain the meaning of the dream the king had. In essence, the dream illustrated that God, "changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings." (Daniel 2:21)

"... the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men." (Dan. 4:17) This King of kings infuses his absolute power into the decisions and actions of his human creatures, ensuring that the course of history will follow his determined path. Men still defy his will and resist his authority, but he persistently prevails.

One rash act may have changed the face of history. How many times has this repeated itself? How often has the Ruler of heaven and earth used or directed these events for a greater purpose?

*Pastor Stan*