

**The Origin of Republican Form of Government in the
United States and the Hebrew Commonwealth**

by
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Following is a transcript of the hand-written manuscript of **Oscar S. Straus**, Jewish American diplomat, statesman, patriot and author – first Jewish American to be appointed Ambassador to a foreign country (Turkey), and U.S. Secretary (of Commerce and Labor), serving under four Administrations: Presidents Grover Cleveland; William McKinley; William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt. Between 1902 and 1926, he served under three presidents at the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague in the Netherlands. A memorial to this distinguished patriot and statesman stands in the nation's capital.

“In 1726, fifty years before the **Declaration of Independence**, the great prophet for America, wrote these lines, which are familiar to every American:

‘Westward the course of Empires takes its way;
The first four acts already past,
The fifth shall close the drama with the day;
Time's noblest offspring is the last.’

Our purpose this evening is to trace the denouement of the last act of this great drama of Empires, **the history and origin of our Republican form of Government**.

The Declaration of Independence was only what its name implies, a **solemn protest**, and statement of grievances of the oppressed and outraged colonists setting forth the reasons for their actions **grounded upon the fundamental principles of justice and civil liberty**, which had been established by Moses and reasserted in different forms under various circumstances by every uprising of the people against the tyranny and injustice of their rulers, which had taken place from that time, until the Declaration was published to the world.

Such revolutions and uprisings, with but rare exceptions, had resulted in nothing more than in overthrowing the then ruling tyrant or monarch, and placing another in his stead, who in a short time relapsed into all the abuses of his predecessors; or in the creation of a different form of government, which under another name contained within itself the same inherent elements of tyranny and oppression.

Whence has come the oft-quoted lines of the philosophical Pope,

‘For forms of government let fools contest;

What e'er is best administered is best.'

It is generally stated that the governments that existed in the various colonies were of a semi-republican type, they were perhaps as near the republican form as it was possible for them to be and yet be circumscribed by royal charters and under the ultimate control of King and parliament.

The people of our colonies were accustomed to a monarchial form of government, that form gave those who resided in England at the time prior to our revolution, all the liberty that was desired.

The protests and complaints of the American people were not directed against the English form of government, but against its unjust exactions and illegal encroachments upon those rights and privileges which the colonists deemed themselves in every way entitled to equally with the English in England.

The English Commonwealth was in a governmental sense a failure, otherwise the restoration would not have taken place. The English people during the period of the Commonwealth, feared the sovereignty of parliament more than they ever did that of the King. The Commons were 'a sort of collective, self-constituted perpetual dictatorship like Rome under the Decemviri. England was enslaved by its legislators; they were irresponsible, absolute and apparently not to be dissolved, but at their own pleasure.'

'It is not a little remarkable,' says Bancroft, 'in the light of the then immediate future, that of the American statesmen who assisted in the framing of the government, not one was originally republican.'

In order to explain in what respect the government of the colonies was of a republican character, let us examine in brief outline the colonial forms of government.

Colonial Governments before the Revolution

In the settlement of the different colonies, three distinct forms of government were established, usually denominated **Provincial or Royal, Proprietary, and Charter**.

The difference resulted from the variety of circumstances under which the colonies were originally settled, as well as from the diversity of objects of the first settlers.

At the revolution, the **Royal form of government** existed in seven colonies. By it the King appointed the governor, the deputy governor and council for the province. The Council formed the Upper House, while the Lower House or Assembly was elected by the people and was consequently the only popular element in that form of government.

The Proprietary form existed in three colonies, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Delaware, it was in most all respects similar to the Royal, with this difference only, that

the proprietor, or person to whom the colony was granted exercised the power which the King possessed in the Royal form.

The Charter governments were confined to the New England colonies; to these colonies the King had granted charters which gave them in substance the right of local self government, the governor, council and assembly were originally chosen by the people themselves.

Whatever oppressions, exactions and encroachments upon their rights and liberties the colonists suffered, were exerted through the medium of these elements of their several forms of government, which derived their creation and authority from the King and parliament.

In the Charter form, when such elements did not exist, the King claimed the right in opposition to the firm and oft-repeated protests of the Colonists to change, alter and even abrogate their charters at his pleasure. He regards them in nature of a privilege of the crown that he might modify or nullify as he might elect.

Under such circumstances it was but natural that the people in their respective colonies should, as they in fact ultimately were forced to do, associate their idea of freedom with the exclusive right of controlling their internal policy. But that idea did not carry with it either the purpose or the desire to establish a government independent of England.

Washington, replying to a British officer in October, 1774, says on this point:

‘It is not the wish of that government (meaning Massachusetts) or any other upon this continent, separately or collectively, to set up for independence, but none of them will ever submit to the loss of those rights and privileges without which life, liberty and property are rendered totally insecure.’

Ten years prior to this time, in 1764, the people of Virginia sent an appeal to King and parliament, which declared that if the people could enjoy ‘their undoubted rights – their connection with Britain the seat of liberty, would be their great happiness.’

And by all the proceedings of the **First Congress which met on the 5th of September 1774, in Carpenters Hall in Philadelphia**, it clearly appears that the establishment of an independent government was neither the purpose or the object endeavored to be attained.

This Congress, in its address to the people of Great Britain says,

‘You have been told we are impatient of government and desirous of independence. These are calumnies. Permit us to be free as yourselves and we shall ever esteem a union with you to be our greatest glory and our greatest happiness.’

For even after the declaration of Independence was signed and published to the world, was it in any wise either determined or assured what form of government the people would adopt.

That question was one which occasioned great anxiety on the part of our founders; the signs of the then times rather pointed to a limited monarchy; at any rate the people were very much divided in opinion – the question of the form of government was rather avoided at this juncture not to arouse thereby opposition whose strength was to be feared.

This clearly appears by the **Resolution of Congress passed on the 10th of May, 1776.** It was resolved:

‘to recommend to the respective assemblies and conventions of the United Colonies, where no government sufficient to the exigencies of their affairs had been established, to adopt such a form of government as should in the opinion of the representatives of the people best conduce to the happiness and safety of their constituents in particular, and of America in general.’

I have quoted these authorities to controvert what is popularly taken for granted, that our independence and form of government were of simultaneous birth.

Chapter II

Formation of Government

The spirit of independence having been aroused to action and its principles boldly proclaimed to the people of America and heralded to all mankind, a new Era in the history of nations was thereby begun, which caused every ruler throughout the civilized globe to tremble on his throne.

The closing scene of the great drama of reformation was being enacted; the solemn protest of the people against arbitrary power.

The manifestations of the same forces that brought about the revolutions of 1688 also produced the revolution of 1776, with this difference, that the English Revolution stopped when Constitutional limitations had been placed around the sovereign powers of the crown, while **the American Revolution was destined to transfer the sovereign powers from the crown to the people, to whom it always belonged as the most priceless gift from the Supreme source of all power, and with whom may it ever remain consecrated by the blood of martyrs and the souls of patriots and statesmen.**

How blind have been and in many lands yet are, the great masses of mankind, overawed by their own Majesty. In the gray dawn of history, the might, the right and the

power of the people, having been wrested from them, and exalted by their royal robbers so high of their heads, that **they prostrated themselves before this awful trinity of their own creation and worshipped it in the form of ‘Divine right of Kings.’**

The usurper’s title and might through ages of wrongs and bloody oppressions, went through an evolution of fanatical consecrations, and thereby became transformed into a demigod under the appellation of ‘King by the grace of God.’

So habituated were the people to the pomp and power of monarchy, that they associated with them even their own rights and loftiest ideas of liberty.

The **Declaration of Independence** such a fundamental protest against that absurd worshipping of royalty, that **the churches in the colonies had to change their litany to conform with its teachings.**

In our day we can scarcely form a correct conception what a mighty battle of reason it required to educate the colonists to such a standard, that the **Declaration of Independence** was a possibility, and after the Declaration, all during the trying period of the revolution, what a moral force and flaming power of argument it required, especially during periods of reverses, to keep alive the spirit of liberty, and after the revolution until the adoption of the Constitution, **what a power of reason and logic of loftiest patriotism based on the fundamental principles of civil liberty, were brought into living action to overcome the hereditary craving for royalty.**

Revolutions in many respects similar to what of 1776 had taken place before – they had been waged in Greece, in Rome, in Carthage, in Switzerland, in Holland and even in England. **What distinguishes the Revolution of 1776** and marks it with such singular preeminence, is not its feats of bravery, though they were by no means insignificant, not its duration, for it was short compassed with countless wars that stain with blood the pages of history, not the numbers that were brought fact to fact in hostile array, for the armies were small compared with those that had contended on many a blood-dyed battlefield, but because of the **results that were achieved, because of the glorious fact that the crown was lifted from the royal brow and placed upon the head of the people, because civil liberty gained all that the sword had won.**

By what means were these all important results effected? **From what sources** of political science **did the great founders of our form of government draw their inspirations?** What guiding precedents did they adopt? What models, sanctified by authority and potent by reason of the blessings of liberty thereunder secured, did they hold up before the eyes of the American people, **wherewith it was possible to combat the hereditary craving for monarchy and the deep rooted doctrine of ‘divine right of Kings.’**

These are the enquires that enter into the solution of our subject, but within the limited space of a paper of this nature, we must content ourselves with considering that I will

endeavor to prove is one of the main elements, it surely is the most ancient, that was brought into requisition **in the founding of our Democratic-Republican form of government** as distinguished from every other form of government, especially the monarchial.

It is a confirmed fact in the history of nations as well as in religion that **systems are reformed by reverting to first principles**, and upon the correct understanding and righteous application of these principles depend the liberty and happiness of the people.

While it is true that the revolution of 1688 had secured for England definite constitutional rights, the effect was not the same in the colonies. If the rights the colonies possessed can be termed liberty, it was only that partial kind of liberty which England experienced before the Bill of Rights.

William the 3rd was no herald of liberty to the Colonies. His course towards them was as absolute as that of the Stuarts. He withheld from the colonies the writ of habeas corpus and he and his successors violated, changed and abrogated their charters.

What was acknowledged as the Constitutional rights of Englishmen was denied to the Americans.

Or as the then great friend of America, Dr. Richard Price puts it;

‘But alas! It often happens in the political world as it does in religion, that the people who cry out most vehemently for liberty to themselves are the the most unwilling to grant it to others.’

This is the very pivot of our independence, and the consequence was that in American the people had to fight over again the same battles for constitutional liberties which the people in England had fought before them, **and in fighting them, they were brought face to face with the fundamental principles of sovereignty and government.**

George the III, so far as his claim over the colonies was concerned, relied as much upon the doctrine of ‘divine right of Kings’ as ever did Charles I. All of those pretensions, all of the questions of right and liberty had to be argued and combated anew. **In doing this it was necessary to go back to the earliest times, to the most sacred records, the Scriptures, for history and for argument.**
1-6.

The doctrine of the ‘divine right of Kings,’ ‘the anointed of God,’ was deduced from the Bible, from the New Testament:

‘Let every soul be subject to higher powers, for there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power,

resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation; for rulers are not a terror to good works but to evil...for he is the minister of God a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil... they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Romans, chap xiii verses 1-6.

And again. The other text which has been made use of by the favorers of arbitrary government is in I Peter, chapter II verses 13 & 14:

‘Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether it be to the King as supreme or unto governors.’

These and other passages were distorted into giving the highest sanction and most sacred authority to all forms of arbitrary government.

Chapter III

The First Conception of the American Union

The Americans were deeply imbued with religious principles. The inestimable privilege of worshipping God according to their own consciences, was denied the pilgrims in England, and they came into the wilds of America to enjoy the sweet boon of toleration.

The Bible was not only their guide in religion but also their text-book in politics. They studied its pages as no people excepting only the Jews had studied it before them, especially the Old Testament, for their own hardships, condition and history bore so striking a similarity to that of the Children of Israel under Moses and Joshua, that they quoted its texts and narratives with a literal application.

Their condition they characterized as ‘Egyptian bondage,’ the English King was their ‘Pharaoh,’ the ocean whose dangers and hardships they encountered was their ‘Red Sea.’

They likened their own numbers to that of the Children of Israel, 3,000,000 souls. America to whose wilds they had come they spoke of as their ‘wilderness’ and in after days, Franklin and Washington were their Moses and Joshua.

In accordance with these Scriptural ideas and analogies, was it all surprising that their first conception of an American Union should be a Theocracy? The same form of government in all its essential characteristics, under the identical name, as the Children of Israel set up for the twelve tribes under their great lawgiver, Moses.

They continued their Theocracy for a period of 41 years, from 1643 to 1684, under which they organized that is known in history as the New England Confederacy. This Confederacy of the four New England Colonies, says Pitkin, ‘served as the basis of the great Confederacy afterwards between the thirteen states of America. **An examination of the two systems will prove a similarity, not only in name, but in general principles.**’

So firmly established had become the history of the Hebrew Commonwealth in the minds of the founders of our Republic, that before Congress adjourned, July 4th, 1776, it was resolved,

‘that Dr. Franklin, Mr. J. Adams and Mr. Jefferson be a committee to prepare a device for a seal for the United States of America.’

These eminent founders prepared a very elaborate device, consisting of,

‘the Children of Israel in the wilderness, lead by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.’

It is said that this device for a seal is on file in the office of the Secretary of state at Washington **in Jefferson’s handwriting.**

Early in the history of the American people, the distinguished Cotton Mather said:

‘New England being a country whose interests are remarkably enwrapped in ecclesiastical circumstances, **ministers ought to concern themselves in politics.**’

And verily they followed his advice. To their everlasting honor and distinguished glory be it said that they ministered not only in the ranks of the Continental Army with their firelocks in hand fighting the battles of the revolution, **but on Sunday their eloquent voices were heard from the pulpit and in the camp, denouncing not only as false in principle, but as against the true spirit of the Scriptures, the slavish doctrines of ‘unlimited submission’ and ‘non resistance,’** which they claimed had been invented by Crown sycophants and court chaplains, to flatter the ears of tyrannical rulers.

They pictured in eloquent words, **the rise and decline of the Hebrew Commonwealth, and read to their listeners again and again the warnings and admonitions of Samuel to the Children of Israel against the wrongs and injustice of Kings.** Thus, by a remarkable and potent coincidence, the very texts and arguments, based on historical and Scriptural authority, advanced by them to resist the unjust exactions and illegal encroachments of the King, and which **stripped the royal scepter of its elements of divinity,** held up before the American people the Hebrew Commonwealth as the model for their government.

So closely are the rights of the people and their form of government allied in the books of Moses.

The consequence was natural, that at the same time and the same arguments by which the Americans were weaned from their monarchical affiliations, that ‘unlimited submission’ is the prerogative of no man, their love for a popular form of government grew stronger and stronger, and with it, the desire to establish that form of government as the **best calculated to perpetuate the inestimable privileges of liberty**, a government that recognized that,

‘all men are created equal’

a government,

‘by the people and for the people.’

We must bear in mind that in the colonial period newspapers were not plentiful and books were comparatively rare, a luxury obtainable by few.

The pulpit occupied a more general sphere and a more potent influence than at the present day. In those days **ministers preached politics as well as religion**. The pulpit was the most direct and effectual way of reaching the masses. As early as 1633, the governor and assistants in the New England colonies began to appoint a minister to deliver a discourse on the day of election. On these occasions political subjects were deemed very appropriate. The discourse was styled the ‘**Election Sermon**’ and was printed, every representative receiving several copies for distribution.

The publication of **these sermons in a pamphlet form** was a part of the regular proceedings of the Assembly, and being scattered over the land, clothed with the double sanction of their high authors and the endorsement of the legislature, became the text-books of human rights, and in every parish they **were regarded as the political pamphlets of the day**.

In 1774 when our country was on the brink of the revolution and its armies gathering, the first **Provincial Congress of Massachusetts acknowledged** with profound gratitude the public obligations to **the ministry as friend of civil and religious liberty**, and invoked their aid in an address to assist them in securing the ‘**rights and liberties of America**’.

Before taking up the literature that supplied so much of the moral force of independence, and **that transplanted from the east the Commonwealth of Moses to the country of Washington**, let us take a brief survey of the Hebrew Commonwealth.

Chapter IV

The Hebrew Commonwealth

In order to trace the logical thread of our subject, we must take a step backward, from the British Isles to the plains of Egypt, from the wilds of America to the hills and valleys of Canaan, from the shores of the Atlantic to the banks of the Jordan, **from the days of Washington and Adams to the times of Moses and Joshua, from the Commonwealth of the Hebrews to the Republic of the United States.**

The Hebrew Commonwealth embraces that period of the history of the Children of Israel, from the Exodus to the selection of Saul as King, that is to say, during the administrations of Moses, Joshua and the Judges, in round numbers, according to the chronology of Josephus, about 500 years, that is from 1600 to 1100 B.C. or according to the vulgar Bible chronology, from 1490 to 990 B.C. We are concerned simply with the facts as they are recorded, with the form of government then established.

The first significant step taken, is that the priestly duties devolve upon Aaron and the military command upon Joshua, while Moses retains the civil administration.

Jethro, his father in law joins Moses in camp, advises and assists him in organizing his people under more regular and effective discipline. This done, they continue their wanderings until **they reach Mount Sinai, where the land is proclaimed which embodied the fundamental principles of free government.** All arbitrary distinctions of class are swept away, the great democratic principle – ‘all men are created equal’ is established, agrarian laws are promulgated, that at every period of seven times seven years the land shall revert to the original owners.

Thus, at the outset, the safe prevention against accumulations of enormous wealth was provided for, so that the rich might not enslave the poor.

The vote of the people is then taken upon their laws and they are adopted under the most solemn circumstances. **Here we find the first recorded beginning of organized democratic government, the people making their own laws.**

Moses is succeeded by Joshua, who leads his conquering armies over the Jordan – the entire laws are again promulgated and **Joshua is confirmed as Chief Executive by a popular vote.**

The Judges were elected by the people and summoned to power as the necessity of the times demanded.

The Central Government was divided into three branches, God and the law were above all and hence it is styled by different writers a **Theocracy** or **Nomocracy** (from ‘nomos,’ meaning Law, or a Commonwealth.

The three branches were:

First: the **Chief Executive**. He was styled Shophete or Judge. He was vested with **Chief Command in war** and at the same time was **the first Magistrate** in time of peace. He summoned the Senatorial and popular Assemblies, proposed subjects for their deliberations, presided in their councils and executed their resolutions. To use the words of the learned Calmet,

‘He was of the law, defender of religion...He was without pomp, without followers, without equipage. He had no settled stipend, nor did he raise anything from the people.’

That the Chief Executive might not wield arbitrary power, and to aid him in conducting the affairs of state, **a Senate was elected consisting of seventy elders**.

Second: **The Senate**. It had its origin in Jethro’s advice to Moses,

‘provide out of all thy people, able and honest men who fear God, men of truth and hating selfishness.’

Thereupon seventy men from the elders of the tribes were **nominated by Moses and confirmed by the voice of the people**.

That **a permanent national Senate was created by Moses** at this early period, is maintained by Jewish writers generally, as well as by Grotius and Selden. The rabbinical writers assert that the Senate continued with short interruptions until the end of the Commonwealth. In later periods, and post-Biblical history, it was styled the Sanhedrin.

That **the Senate was not a self-constituted body** is plainly set forth by Moses in his recapitulatory address contained in the first chapter of Deuteronomy. He says:

‘I am not able to bear you myself alone, take ye wise men and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you.’

Third: **The Assembly**. The third or popular ranch of government was the Assembly. **That such existed appears from many Scriptural passages which makes mention of ‘all Israel, ‘ of ‘all the Congregation,’** and we find that when Joshua had parceled out the land of Canaan among the various tribes ‘and it came to pass after many days, after the Lord had given rest unto Israel – that Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders and for their officers.’ (Joshua XXIII).

At this early period in the history of mankind, 1500 years before the Christian era, centuries before Greece and Rome had obtained a foothold in history, 500 years before Homer sang and 1,000 years and more before Plato dreamed of his ideal Republic, when all western Europe was an untrodden wilderness, the Children of Israel on the banks of

the Jordan, just emerged from centuries of bondage, not only **recognized the guiding principles of civil and religious liberty**, that,

‘all men are created equal,’

that God and the law are the only Kings, but also established a free Commonwealth under a written Constitution, a government of and for the people.

Chapter V

The Republic of the United States and the Hebrew Commonwealth

Ministers holding up the Hebrew Commonwealth as a Model

It is remarkable that not one of the many historians who have written so ably and minutely the history of the United States should have traced in his writings the relationship that existed between our Republic and the Commonwealth of the Hebrews, especially in the light of the frequent references thereto made by the **Ministers in their political discourses, who constantly drew their civil creed from the history of those times and held up this pure and ancient form of government as a model inspired under the guidance of the Most High.**

The distinguished Jonathan Mayhew, the divine whom Robert Treat Paine styled ‘the father of civil and religious liberty in Massachusetts and in America,’ who suggested to James Otis the idea of a Committee of Correspondence, a miasma of great efficiency in producing concert of action between the colonies, in a discourse delivered in Boston on May 23rd, 1766 on the ‘Repeal of the Stamp Act’ says:

‘God gave Israel a King (or absolute monarchy) in His anger, because they had not sense and virtue enough to like **a free Commonwealth and to have Himself for their King...** where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty...And if any miserable people on the Continent or isles of Europe be driven in their extremity to seek a safe retreat from slavery in some far distant clime, O let them find one in America.’

We living in this age can with difficulty appreciate what moral courage it required at that time to **publicly avow such sentiments and principles as these**, so fatal to despotic power as to assume the very garb of rebellion.

Rev. Dr. Samuel Langdon, the president of Harvard College, who through the influence of John Hancock was installed as the successor of John Locke, and who afterwards in 1788 was a member of the New Hampshire Convention when the

Constitution came before that body for adoption, in his Election Sermon, delivered before ‘the Honorable Congress of Massachusetts Bay,’ on the 31st of May, 1775, taking as his text the passages in Isaiah I.26,

‘And I will restore thy Judges as at first,’ etc.,

delivered a most eloquent discourse wherein he traces the history of government from its first recorded beginnings. These are his words:

‘The Jewish government according to the original Constitution which was divinely established...was a perfect Republic. And let them who cry up the Divine right of Kings consider that the form of government which had a proper claim to divine establishment was so far from including **the idea of a King, that it was a high crime for Israel to ask to be in this respect like other nations....**The civil polity of Israel is doubtless an excellent general model, allowing for some peculiarities, at least some principal laws and orders of it may be copied in more modern establishments.’

By a special vote, **Dr. Langdon’s sermon** was ordered to be printed and sent to every minister in the colony and to every member of Congress.

What effect such a sermon had upon the minds of the people in general as well as upon the founders of our Republic, is scarcely a matter to be left to conjecture, when in takes into consideration that he was not only a ripe scholar, occupying the most eminent literary position in America as president of Harvard College, but also one of the foremost Ministers and pulpit orators, an acknowledged authority in the science of Government. **This same divine**, when the Constitution was before the New Hampshire Convention, delivered an **Election Sermon on June 5, 1788, entitled ‘The Republic of the Israelites, an Example o the American States.’**

The next discourse I desire to call to your attention is the **Election Sermon of the following year preached on the 29th May, 1776, some 40 days before the Declaration of Independence**, before ‘the Honorable Council and the Honorable House of Representatives of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay by the Rev. Samuel West, who was a member of the convention for forming the Constitution of Massachusetts and of that of 1788, which ratified the Constitution of the U.S. **Taking as his text Isaiah I.26**, the same as was selected by dr. Langdon before quoted, he says,

‘we are to remember that all men being by nature equal’

they have a right to make such regulations as they deem necessary for the good of all, **that magistrates have no authority but what they derive from the people.** He then passes in review those two famous passages from the New Testament under whose authority monarch, tyrants and usurpers have claimed as sanctioned by Holy Writ the

right of obedience under all circumstances and from which were deduced the doctrines of ‘Divine right and unlimited submission.’

These passages are found in I Peter II verses 13 & 14, the other passage is from Romans XIII, (‘Let every soul be subject to higher powers. The powers that be ordained of God...for they are God’s ministers.’)

From this he passes in review the various forms of government, directing special attention to the liberal civil polity of the Hebrew Commonwealth.

‘There was a great deal propriety,’ are his words, ‘in the advice Jethro gave to Moses, to provide able men, men of truth – and to appoint them for rulers over the people.

‘He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.’

The last of these politico-theological discourses I will call to your attention, was preached before ‘His Excellency, Governor Trumbull and the Honorable General Assembly of the State of Connecticut’ **on May 8th, 1783, by the eminent president of Yale College, the Rev. Dr. Ezra Stiles**, who, as early as 1760, predicted that,

‘the imperial dominion will subvert as it ought in election.’

He was the lifelong friend of Benjamin Franklin. Dr. Stiles took as his text, **Deuteronomy XXVI.19:**

‘And to make thee high above all nations, which he has made in praise and in name and in honor’ etc.

He then proceeded to deliver a discourse,

‘On the Future Glory of the United States.’

This sermon takes up 120 closely printed pages and assumes the proportions of a treatise on government from the Hebrew Commonwealth down to the then present, reasoning from illustration and history that the culmination of popular government had been reached in America, transplanted in fulfillment of Biblical prophecy from the days of Moses to the Land of Washington, and then proceeds to present,

‘the reasons rendering it probable that the United States will, by the ordering of Heaven, eventually become this people,’

meaning the scattered tribes of Israel.

His words are:

‘Here (at the foot of Mount Nebo) the man of God, Moses, assembled

three millions of people – the number of the United States’

and gave them the second publication of the law.

That the writings of Moses and the prophets are interspersed with promises that when the ends of God’s moral government should be answered, He would recover and gather them (quoting Deut. XXX.3),

‘from all the nations wither God had scattered them, that the words of Moses hitherto accomplished but in part, will be literally fulfilled.’

‘I shall,’ he continues, ‘enlarge no further upon the primary sense of this and numerous other prophesies...for I have assumed the text only as introductory to a discourse upon **the political welfare of God’s American Israel.**’

A volume would not contain all the political pulpit discourses delivered in the halls of legislation and in the camps of the Continental Army wherein this ancient and most sacred model of popular government was held up as a guide for example, for precedent and for imitation.

I have taken care to cite only such of these discourses as were delivered by men who were distinguished, not only in the pulpit, but were equally famed as students of political history and **prominent in the halls of legislation, when the Constitution came up for discussion and adoption.**

Chapter VI

Patriotic Authors and Statesmen Employing the Hebrew Commonwealth as a Model

We will in conclusion **trace the model of the Hebrew Commonwealth in the constitutional conventions** and in the writings and pamphlets published prior to the adoption of the Constitution.

We must not lose sight of the fact, that neither the Declaration of Independence, nor the success of our armies in the struggle against Great Britain, decided for us our Republican form of government, nor secured for us the blessings of civil and religious liberty; they only served to make them possible. These were the victories of the statesmen, heroes and the patriots of the pen.

‘Now just as the day was dawning and independence about to be secured, everything seemed to tumble in chaos about them, threatening a state of things worse than their former condition as colonists.’

A paper embodying the views and sentiments of Washing's own army while stationed about Newburg, was drawn up and presented to their commander in chief, by Col. Nicola, an old and esteemed officer, after describing the perilous state of feeling in the army, and the dangerous aspect of affairs by reason of the prostration of the public faith and credit of the nation, and showing the necessity of settling at once on a form of government now as peace was assured, that it must be a strong one, took up the various forms of government in the world, and summed up by declaring that a Republican government was the most unstable and insecure, and a Constitutional Monarchy like that of England, the strongest and safest – and in short, offered to make Washington Dictator, and then concluded in these words:

‘Owing to the prejudices of the people, it might not at first be prudent to assume the title of royalty, but if all other things were adjusted, we believe strong arguments might be produced for admitting the title of king.’

Like Gideon, the righteous Judge of Israel, whom the people offered to make King in their unbounded gratitude for delivering them from the hands of their most powerful foes, the Midianites, **Washington disdained the proffered crown.**

This monarchial spirit was so strong, that it survived as a party even after the adoption of the Constitution, until the election of Jefferson, who refers to it in his inaugural address.

No one arrayed the monarchial tendencies of the times with a more rigorous and fearless pen, no one contributed more in kindling the fires of liberty during those ‘times that tried men’s souls,’ **than Thomas Paine**, design could **that much maligned and abused man, who has been accused of every crime that malice could invent.**

This loyal and staunch supporter of our country in the hours of her greatest peril, the friend of Franklin, under whose patronage he came to America, the **editor of the Pennsylvania Magazine, the secretary of the Committee of Foreign Affairs of the Continental Congress, beloved and esteemed by Washington**, by whom he was invited when in distressed circumstances to share the hospitalities of his home. Call him deist, call him atheist, call him what you will – he was, in the words of James Monroe,

‘the friend of human rights and a distinguished and able advocate in favor of public liberty.’

He was the author of ‘**Common Sense**,’ of which **Washington said**, on the 31st of January, 1776,

‘A few more of such flaming arguments as were exhibited at Falmouth and Norfolk added to **the sound doctrine and unanswerable reasoning contained in the pamphlet**

‘**Common Sense**’ will not leave numbers at a loss to decide on the propriety of separation.’

This book, said **Dr. Rush**,

‘burst forth from the press with an effect that has been rarely produced by types and paper in any age or century.’

The former part of this remarkable and flaming production is devoted to the subject of **‘Monarchy and Hereditary Succession.’**

The argument against this is taken entirely from **the Hebrew Commonwealth**,

‘Monarchy is ranked in Scriptures’ says he, **‘as one of the sins of the Jews.’**

He narrates the rejection of the crown by **Gideon** and then follows the Scriptural narrative concerning the people demanding a King, quoting in full Samuel’s reply and prophetic admonitions, and concludes in these words,

‘These portions of **the Scriptures** are direct and positive, they admit of no equivocal construction. **That the Almighty hath here entered his protest against monarchical government is true, or the Scriptures are false.**’

Unfortunately we have only skeleton reports of the proceedings and debates of the Federal and many of the State Conventions on the adoption of the Constitution, even from these it appears that **the Hebrew Commonwealth, its laws and its teachings were frequently quoted by distinguished representatives, as illustration, argument and authority for a purely Democratic-Republican form of government.**

In the legislatures of the several states before which **the Constitution** came for adoption, the delegates again and again referred to this time-honored model.

In the New York Convention, the Chancellor of the State, **Robert R. Livingston** referred to it. **John Lansing**, in his speech urging adoption, says:

‘Sir, **the instance adduced from the history of the Jewish Theocracy** evinces that there are certain situations in communities which will unavoidably lead to results similar to those we experience.’

The Honorable Mr. Smith quoted in full the admonition of Samuel.

In short, again and again, in and out of the halls of legislatures, in the orations, newspapers and pamphlets of the day, **was the history of the Hebrew Commonwealth narrated, rehearsed and applied by the advocates of a Republican form of**

government, so that the prophetic admonitions of Samuel became **as familiar to the American people as the words of the Lord's Prayer.**

Dr. David Tappan, who after the declaration of peace, was chosen professor at Harvard College, in the course of his lectures on the 'Jewish Antiquities' says,

'from hence some writers have inferred that monarchy is in its very nature criminal, that it impiously invades the prerogative **of the Supreme Ruler** as well as the equal rights of man.'

'This inference,' says the learned professor, 'was plausibly enforced on the American people in the beginning of the year 1776 by a very popular, but desultory writer, (doubtless meaning **Thomas Paine**), and this sentiment, with other equally well timed, operated with the swiftness and force of the electric fluid in preparing the country for a formal separation from the British Monarch.'

Many more reliable authorities can be adduced upon this same subject, but I have occupied already enough of your time.

Whether we conclude or not that the Republic of the United States is the direct heir of the Hebrew Commonwealth, we can not fail to admit that **the trials, sufferings and fortitude of the Children of Israel** during their long and weary wanderings from the land of their oppressors until the organization of popular government on the banks of the Jordan, have **served in no inconsiderable degree as a glorious example and inspiring incentive to the American people in their heroic struggle for the blessings of civil and religious liberty.** And that the prophetic admonitions of the last Judge of Israel, followed by the corroborating revelations of history, supplied the argument that battered down the absurd doctrine of 'divine right of Kings.' And its enslaving corollaries 'unlimited submission' and 'non-resistance.'

No one but He who rules the destinies of nations in all ages could have ordained that the bright sun of Canaan should rise again in after ages with refulgent splendor over the vast continent of America to bless millions of people, **and that pure, unselfish and righteous spirit of Moses, Joshua and Gideon should live again in the wisdom of a Franklin, the patriotism of a Washington and in the sound statesmanship of an Adams.**

May the people of America who have learned so much by the example of this ancient Commonwealth in its rise to glory and freedom, also profit by the lessons of its decline.

Let those narrow-minded and misguided men who would counter the Grand Charter of our liberties by sectarian amendments, shrink back in holy horror from so suicidal a step – let them read the records of their country's birth and from them learn that civil and religious liberty in spirit are inseparable, and when they throttle the one, they destroy the other.

O America, thy bright example is the guiding hope of all the oppressed nations of the world. The winds from the west are constantly wafting thy spirit of civil and religious liberty into the farthest confines of the east, by thy shining light, the champions of popular rights are battling against every form of absolutism in Russia, in Turkey, in Spain and in the great German Empire.

O America, the promised land for all mankind, thy glorious example is a power more puissant than army or navy for the conquest of the world.

Finis
Jan 10/84