

# Biblical Principles

**PRIN'CIPL**; n [L. *principium*, beginning]; a truth, that which supports an assertion, an action, or a series of actions; a law comprehending many subordinate truths.

ONE IN A SERIES

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## Roots of the Republic

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.”

—Exodus 19:5

In the beginning, after the Continental Congress had adopted the Declaration of Independence, it established a three-man committee to design an appropriate great seal for the new United States of America. The three members of the committee were John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson proposed depicting the Hebrews in the wilderness guided by the pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day (Exodus 13:21, 22). Franklin suggested that the national motto be “Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God” and that the words be emblazoned around the great seal depicting Moses parting the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21).

On November 20, 1772, Samuel Adams, in his report of the Boston Committee of Correspondence, wrote: “The rights of the colonists as Christians . . . may be best understood by reading and carefully studying the institution of the Great Law Giver and Head of the Christian Church, which are to be found clearly written and promulgated in the New Testament.”

Some 180 years later, in 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, referring to the beginnings of this nation, remarked, “. . . the purpose of a devout and united people was set forth in the pages of the Bible . . . (1) to live in freedom, (2) to work in a prosperous land . . . , (3) to obey the commandments of God. . . . This Biblical story of the Promised land inspired the founders of America. It continues to inspire us.”

“There is no need to turn back to the cultural dregs of ancient, pagan Rome and Greece” to seek the origins of the American republic.<sup>1</sup> The facts of history attest that the roots of the American Republic go back, not so much to Mt. Olympus or to the Seven Hills of Rome, but to Mt. Sinai and that hill on which the cross of Calvary stood. Back to the laws of God and the love of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Those who have studied the ways of the Founding Fathers report that the book most widely read and quoted was the Holy Bible—and from the Bible, the book most often cited was Deuteronomy. In that book, the builders of the republic found, in effect, a major part of the blueprint for the republic they were to design.

The Psalmist has asked, “If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3). The answer, of course, is to rebuild the foundations, even as Ezra and Nehemiah rebuilt the wall and the temple. And, if we are to rebuild the foundations and workings of the American Republic, we would do well to consider some of the basic Biblical principles upon which this republic was constructed in the first place.

Consider, then, these ten basic Biblical principles of civil government which the Lord God set forth through Moses to Israel. And consider how the Founding Fathers fitted them into the foundations of the American Republic.

### 1. The Sovereignty of God

At the outset, the Lord established the worship of the one true God as a matter of civil government. This stood in stark contrast to the prevalent polytheism and idolatry of that day.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5).

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:2, 3).

"We have this day restored the Sovereign to Whom all men ought to be obedient. He reigns in heaven and from the rising to the setting of the sun, let His kingdom come!

—Samuel Adams, as he signed the Declaration of Independence.

## 2. Unity (Union) Under God

Just as the 12 tribes of Israel were sovereign entities voluntarily joined into the Hebrew commonwealth (republic) so the colonies joined in a union of states—a federal union with equal rights under God's law. (God's Ten Commandments not only laid the foundation for the moral/religious law of the Hebrew Republic, they formed the basis for the system of civil legislation—the rights, responsibilities, dos and don'ts of all citizens.

"We have staked the future of the American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it—we have staked the future of our political institutions upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God."

—James Madison, "architect" of the Constitution and fourth President of the United States.

## 3. Individual Liberty Under God

In His "preamble" to the Decalogue, the Lord reminded the Hebrews that He was the Author and Finisher of their liberty; that it was He Who set them free:

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2).

And again, in Leviticus 26:13, God emphasized that He was the source of their freedom; that it was He Who had "broken the bands of your yoke."

So it was also with the release of the colonies from the rising tyrannies of Great Britain, King and Parliament, which is why, gratefully and with propriety, our pledge of allegiance to the republic and the flag for which it stands stresses these words: "One Nation, Under God, with liberty and justice for all."

## 4. The Sanctity of Human Life

"You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13) . . . for ". . . God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27; see also Genesis 9:5, 6; Exodus 21:12, 14, 21-23; Deuteronomy 22:8).

In his invaluable work, *The Hebrew Republic*, Rev. E. C. Wines wrote:

No legislation of antiquity approaches that of the Hebrew lawgiver (God through Moses) in its solicitude to guard the lives of men. The prohibition against killing was one of the ten precepts which formed what may be called the magna carta of the Hebrew states.

And so it was in this American Republic, for a good part of her first 200 years. But, who will say today that this nation now protects the sanctity of human life—when a baby is aborted every 20 seconds of every working day?

## 5. The Political Equality of the People

All and each are equal before God and before His law. Thus, it must be likewise before men and under the laws of men. No individual is above the law; no one is below it. In a nation under God, there is no divine right of kings or presidents or governors or congressmen or bureaucrats.

"You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's" (Deuteronomy 1:17; see also Leviticus 19:15).

## 6. The Power of the People to Elect and Oversee Their Representatives and to Authorize the Enactment of Proper (Constitutional) Laws

The Lord God Himself required that the people of Israel elect Him King before He would exercise civil authority. Even though the whole of creation was His and under His sovereignty, it was only after the Israelites "voted" to make Him King that God assented to take office:

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.' So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him" (Exodus 19:5-7).

"And He was King in Jeshurun, when the leaders of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together" (Deuteronomy 33:5).

And when the people demanded that a mortal man be king "like all the nations" what was it God said to Samuel? ". . . [T]hey have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Samuel 8:7).

In like manner, civil officials (magistrates, judges, etc.) were selected and elected by the people (Deuteronomy 1:13, 14; Joshua 18:4; Judges 11:11; 2 Samuel 3, 4, 5, 12), and accountable to the people (1 Samuel 10:25; 12:1-5; 1 Kings 12). The people of the 12 Hebrew tribes voted for (ratified) the Decalogue before it became their Constitution (Exodus 24:3). "The Hebrew Constitution was adopted by the Hebrew people, as truly as the American constitution was adopted by the American People" (Wines).

7. Checks and Balances and the Division of Civil Powers

The Decalogue (Hebrew Constitution) was the root law of the Hebrew Republic, just as the Constitution once was the root law of the American Republic. No ruler, no tribe, no faction, no pressure group, no politician, no citizen was above it. All laws in the republic were required to conform to its original intent, purpose, and matrix.

The flow of power and authority (power and force) went from the Lord God to the people and thence to those the people elected or appointed. God established it in that manner because the more widely power is dispersed in the hands of the freeholders, the more difficult it is to be abrogated, violated, or pre-empted.

Each of the 12 tribes was a sovereign commonwealth. Each was equal to other tribes in regard to political stature; each had its own governance, established and administered its municipal, district, and tribal legislation. (Judges 1; 1 Chronicles 4:21-23; 5:10, 19-22). For parallels with the American republic as it was designed and meant to be, see U. S. Constitution, ART. IV., Sec. 4, 9th and 10th Amendments.

There were three branches of civil government: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial. Each had its specific responsibilities and powers. (See ART. I- III.)

The legislative branch of the Hebrew Republic had both an upper and a lower house: the Supreme Senate comprising 12 tribal princes and the 58 chiefs of the clans (Numbers 1:16; 26; Exodus 4:29 ff.), and the General Assembly (congregation of Israel) (Numbers 10:4).

The supreme civil authority in the land was the Lord God; His word was law. The chief magistrate (executive) was God's viceroy proposed by God's oracle and elected to office by the people (Numbers 27:18-23); Judges 11:4-11; 1 Samuel 7:5, 6, etc.). The magistrate was a minister of God to the people for good (Romans 13:1-7); he could not be a foreigner (Deuteronomy 17:15) and he had broad civil and military power. But, he was answerable to the legislature and to the judiciary—and, above them, to the people (Joshua 1:12-18).

The federal judiciary was embodied in the Supreme Court (Deuteronomy 17:8-11) which was the zenith of appeals for individual citizens and was the court before which the legal contests between the tribes (states) were heard. The authority of the judiciary was checked by the Senate and at the same time the power of the Senate was checked by the judiciary and, above all, by the power residing in the people.

8. Inexpensive, Swift, and Impartial System of Justice

God through Moses established a comprehensive system of justice with both inferior and superior (lower and higher) courts. It has been estimated that there were about 78,000 judges seated

throughout the Hebrew Republic. They were available at all the gates (the most convenient location for the citizens—Deuteronomy 16:18) and the courts served at every level—from municipal courts to the Supreme Court (Exodus 18:21). The individual had the right to appeal "all the way" (Deuteronomy 17:8, 9).

In the Hebrew Republic, the small as well as the great, the poor as well as the wealthy, received speedy and equal justice. Justice delayed, justice so expensive that the common man cannot afford it, is not justice.

Ten Basic Biblical Principles of Government

1. The Sovereignty of God
2. Unity (Union) Under God
3. Individual Liberty Under God
4. The Sanctity of Human Life
5. The Political Equality of the People
6. The Power of the People to Elect and Oversee Their Representatives and to Authorize the Enactment of Proper (Constitutional) Laws
7. Checks and Balances and the Division of Civil Powers
8. Inexpensive, Swift, and Impartial System of Justice
9. Protection of Private Property and Preservation of the Sanctity of the Family
10. Universal Education for Self and Civil Government Based on God's Law-Word

## 9. Protection of Private Property and Preservation of the Sanctity of the Family

God's foundational unit is the family; the family is the microcosm of God's entire social and civil system. As the Lord God commanded in the beginning (Genesis 2:24), Mosaic law (and American law) regarded the husband and the wife as one. The laws concerning marriage and sexual activities, the laws concerning procreation and children, inheritance, private ownership of property, usury, debt, debt release, etc.—all were established and administered to protect and preserve the family.

As E. C. Wines wrote, "The whole scope of the Second Table of the Decalogue is to guard the institution of the family and the institution of Property."

## 10. Universal Education for Self and Civil Government Based on God's Law-Word

An ignorant people cannot long be a free people. Thus, a fundamental principle of the Hebrew Republic—and of the American Republic in its early years—was the education of the people—especially in the knowledge of God's Word (including the Constitution/Decalogue), the history of the nation (Exodus 13:14, 15), and nurture and admonition of the Lord. (See the Northwest Ordinance, 1787, regarding the importance which the Founding Fathers gave to religion, morality, and education.)

Since God meant for all the people to share in the management of public affairs, the people were taught to understand and fulfill their responsibilities as both individual citizens (internal—self government) and as citizens of the republic (external—civil government).

Schools were found in every district of the Hebrew republic "under teachers who were honored alike for their character and station." Education was superintended by the Levites, and the priests were commanded to go throughout the land to teach the people (2 Chronicles 17:8, 9). In the early American colonies—and states, where were found some of the highest literacy rates of those times, education was primarily—in fact, in many areas, solely—the shared responsibility of church and home. One hundred six of the first 108 colleges in America were founded on the Christian faith and for promulgation of knowledge in the Word of God and the advancement of the Christian law and ethic.

### Looking Back to Look Ahead

"No form of polity has ever approached it (the Hebrew Republic) in grandeur, purity, simplicity and beneficence. Had men been more perfect, it would have stood forever. But, human inconstancy wearied even of a more perfect government; and mortal passions corrupted even a divine institution; and the commonwealth of

Israel, like the empire of Rome, at length fell beneath the weight of its own vices . . ." (Wines).

Take heed, America. Awaken, God's church! Arise! It is for us who are His and who are here, now, to seek to be used of Him to rebuild both the temple and the State (the ministry of grace and the ministry of justice)—and to do this, not simply for our own protection or our children's safety or well-being, but for the glory of God: To magnify His Holy Name and advance His kingdom.

For, if the foundation be destroyed, or weakened, is not such work of restoration the task of the righteous?

1. Rev. Louis deBoer, in Foreword to E. C. Wines, *The Hebrew Republic*, American Presbyterian Press, Uxbridge, Mass., 1973. Originally published as Volume II of *Commentary on the Law of the Ancient Hebrews*, E. C. Wines, D. D., LL. D., (New York, George Putnam & Co., 1853).

2. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son . . ." If God loved each individual that much, if each individual is that important in the eyes of God, can he or she be any less important in the eyes of men? Or, the eyes of the state? Here is the bedrock foundation of the Christian idea of man and government—and the Christian methodology of self and civil government—the concept of government which turned the world upside down.

(NOTE: All Scripture is from the New King James Version.)

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