

THE REPUBLIC OF THE ISRAELITES AN EXAMPLE TO THE AMERICAN STATES

By Samuel Langdon

EXETER

1788

Samuel Langdon (1723-1797). A native of Boston, Langdon was graduated from Harvard in the class of 1740 with Samuel Adams. The two young men shared the same political views during the revolutionary and early national periods—which is to say, Langdon was a Whig and a patriot in the sacred cause of liberty. Soon after graduation, Langdon, a Congregational minister, served as chaplain of the New Hampshire Regiment at the taking of Louisbourg (1745), then became pastor of the North Church in Portsmouth, where he served until becoming president of Harvard College in 1774. That tenure was difficult and unpleasant for Langdon, and he was glad to relinquish it in 1780 and return to the pulpit at Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, where he remained during the final seventeen years of his life.

As a confidant of the leading patriots of the region, Langdon well represented the mind of the revolutionary generation in his political sermons. His 1775 election sermon, *Government Corrupted by Vice, and Recovered by Righteousness*, preached in Watertown, Massachusetts, is a classic; it was reprinted in John W. Thornton, ed., *The Pulpit of the American Revolution* (1860). Langdon was prominent in securing the adoption of the federal Constitution as a delegate to the New Hampshire state convention in 1788.

The Republic of the Israelites an Example to the American States was the election sermon for New Hampshire preached in 1788.

I think myself happy that, after reiterated invitations from this honourable court, I am at length permitted by divine providence, though under peculiar difficulties, and in the decline of life, to appear in this place, and speak on this public occasion, when the principal officers of government are to be appointed to their several departments, according to the suffrages of the people. I will endeavor to give due honor to the rulers of the people, while I declare, with simplicity of heart and honest freedom, the admonitions which the great Lord of the universe gives; and offer my best thoughts as to the general administration of public affairs, and the way to secure the prosperity and happiness of a nation.

There is a remarkable paragraph in the sacred writings, which may be very well accommodated to my present purpose, and merits particular attention. You have it in Deuteronomy, IV, 5–8.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, who shall hear all these statutes, and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people: for what nation is there so great, which hath God so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? and what nation is there so great, which hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day.

Here Moses recommends to Israel the strict observance of all the laws which he had delivered to them by God's command, relating both to their civil polity and religion, as the sure way to raise their reputation high among all nations as a wise and understanding people; because no other nation was blessed with such excellent national laws, or the advantage of applying to the oracle of the living God, and praying to him in all difficulties, with assurance that all their requests would be answered.

As to every thing excellent in their constitution of government, except what was peculiar to them as a nation separated to God from the rest of mankind, the Israelites may be considered as a pattern to the world in all ages; and from them we may learn what will exalt our character, and what will depress and bring us to ruin.

Let us therefore look over their constitution and laws, enquire into their practice, and observe how their prosperity and fame depended on their strict observance of the divine commands both as to their government and religion.

They had both a civil and military establishment under divine direction, and a complete body of judicial laws drawn up and delivered to them by Moses in God's name. They had also a form of religious worship, by the same authority, minutely prescribed, designed to preserve among them the knowledge of the great Creator of the Universe, and teach them to love and serve him; while idolatry prevailed through the rest of the world: and this religion contained not only a public ritual, but a perfect, though very concise, system of morals, comprehended in ten commands, which require the perfection of godliness, benevolence, and rectitude of conduct.

When first the Israelites came out from the bondage of Egypt, they were a multitude without any other order than what had been kept up, very feebly, under the ancient patriarchal authority. They were suddenly collected into a body under the conduct of Moses, without any proper national or military regulation. Yet in the short space of about three months after they had passed the red sea, they were reduced into such civil and military order, blended together by the advice of Jethro, as was well adapted to their circumstances in the wilderness while destitute of property. Able men were chosen out of all their tribes, and made captains and rulers of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens: and these commanded them as military officers, and acted as judges in matters of common controversy.

But the great thing wanting was a permanent constitution, which might keep the people peaceable and obedient while in the desert, and after they had gained possession of the promised land. Therefore, upon the complaint of Moses that the burden of government was too heavy for him, God commanded him to bring seventy men, chosen from among the elders and officers, and present them at the tabernacle; and there he endued them with the same spirit which was in Moses, that they might bear the burden with him. Thus a senate was evidently constituted, as necessary for the future government of the nation, under a chief commander. And as to the choice of this senate, doubtless the people were consulted, who appear to have had a voice in all public affairs from time to time, the whole congregation being called together on all important occasions: the government therefore was a proper republic.

And beside this general establishment, every tribe had elders and a prince according to the patriarchal order, with which Moses did not interfere; and these had an acknowledged right to meet and consult together, and with the consent of the congregation do whatever was necessary to preserve good order, and promote the common interest of the tribe. So that the government of each tribe was very similar to the general government. There was a president and senate at the head of each, and the people assembled and gave their voice in all great matters: for in those ages the people in all republics were entirely unacquainted with the way of appointing delegates to act for them, which is a very excellent modern improvement in the management of republics.

Moreover, to compleat the establishment of civil government, courts were to be appointed in every walled city, after their settlement in Canaan, and elders most distinguished for wisdom and integrity were to be made judges, ready always to sit and decide the common controversies within their respective jurisdictions. The people had a right likewise to appoint such other officers as they might think necessary for the more effectual execution of justice, according to that order given in Deut. 16. 18, 19—

Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates which the Lord thy God giveth thee throughout thy tribes; and they shall judge the people with just judgment: thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift; for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous.

But from these courts an appeal was allowed in weighty causes to higher courts appointed over the whole tribe, and in very great and difficult cases to the supreme authority of the general senate and chief magistrate.

A government, thus settled on republican principles, required laws; without which it must have degenerated immediately into aristocracy, or absolute monarchy. But God did not leave a people, wholly unskilled in legislation, to make laws for themselves: he took this important matter wholly into his own hands, and beside the moral laws of the two tables, which directed their conduct as individuals, gave them by Moses a complete code of judicial laws. They were not numerous indeed, but concise and plain, and easily applicable to almost every controversy which might arise between man and man, and every criminal case which might require the judgment of the court. Of these some were peculiarly adapted to their national form, as divided into tribes and families always to be kept distinct; others were especially suited to the peculiar nature of the government as a theocracy, God himself being eminently their king, and manifesting himself among them in a visible manner, by the cloud of glory in the tabernacle and temple. This was the reason why blasphemy, and all obstinate disobedience to his laws, were considered as high treason, and punished with death; especially idolatry, as being a crime against the fundamental principles of the constitution. But far the greater part of the judicial laws were founded on the plain immutable principles of reason, justice, and social virtue; such as are always necessary for civil society. Life and property were well guarded, and punishments were equitably adapted to the nature of every crime: in particular, murder stands foremost among capital crimes, and is defined with such precision, and so clearly distinguished from all cases of accidental and undesigned killing, that the innocent were in no danger of punishment, and the guilty could not escape. And if we still pay regard to this divine law, which is evidently founded on reason and justice, the modern distinction of manslaughter must be rejected as a popish invention, contrived and added in times when superstition reigned and claimed a power above all laws. These laws were sufficient for a nation which had but little commerce abroad; especially as the oracle of Jehovah might be consulted in all cases of a very extraordinary nature.

Let us now consider the national worship which God established among his people; on which their obedience to the moral law very much depended: for unless they paid constant reverence and homage to their God, agreeable to his nature and will, they would soon break loose from all other obligations to morality.

Now as to their ritual; however contemptible, and even ridiculous, it may seem to men whose ideas are all modern, and who proudly condemn divine revelation; and notwithstanding it is now abrogated by a far more glorious revelation of grace and truth by Jesus Christ; no religious institution could be more perfectly accommodated to those early ages of the world, and the situation of the Israelites in the midst of idolaters, or better prepare the way for the truth and mercy of the gospel. In those ages the minds of men were not sufficiently cultivated to receive that religion which is spiritual and simple, detached from sensible objects, and destitute of worldly grandeur. Other nations worshipped their gods with an endless variety of superstitious rites, a multitude of costly sacrifices, and all kinds of external pomp, which they fancied would be acceptable to deities to whom they attributed the imperfections and even the worst vices of men. Their worship gratified all the senses, was accommodated to every passion and lust, and indulgent to gross immoralities; it not only captivated vulgar minds, but bound the greatest heroes, politicians, and philosophers, fast in the chains of superstition. Therefore it was necessary that the worship of the true God should not be destitute of that splendour which, in those ages, struck the minds of men with awe and reverence. Without some magnificence the best religion would have appeared contemptible in the view of the world; and the Israelites themselves, dazzled with the pageantry of idols, would almost inevitably have been captivated; as, notwithstanding every guard which could be placed about them, we find the fashion of the rest of the world had surprising power over them. But the ceremonies of worship which God commanded his people to observe, were not, like those of the heathen, inhuman, frantic, obscene, varied a thousand ways according to the different characters of their gods; no, but by infinite wisdom they were calculated to promote the knowledge of the divine perfections, and obedience to the laws of righteousness, and give the most encouraging hope in the goodness and mercy of God. The ritual of the Israelites was rational, sober, uniform, plainly intended to exhibit the majesty, purity, and mercy of the eternal king; to humble men before him under a continual sense of guilt; and to assure true

penitents of free pardon by virtue of the appointed sacrifices, which were types of that one sacrifice which Christ has offered for the sins of the world. And to render their worship more striking in their own view; and in the eyes of the world, their tabernacle and temple, their priesthood with its ornaments, their solemn assemblies and great festivals, were decent and magnificent beyond every thing seen among the nations around.

How unexampled was this quick progress of the Israelites, from abject slavery, ignorance, and almost total want of order, to a national establishment perfected in all its parts far beyond all other kingdoms and states! from a mere mob, to a well regulated nation, under a government and laws far superior to what any other nation could boast!

It was a long time after the law of Moses was given before the rest of the world knew any thing of government by law. Where kings reigned their will was a law. Where popular governments were formed, the capricious humour of the multitude ordered every thing just according to present circumstances; or their senators and judges were left to act according to their best discretion. It was six hundred years after Moses before the Spartans, the most famous of the Grecian republics, received a very imperfect, and in some particulars very absurd code of laws from Lycurgus. After this feeble attempt of legislation, three hundred years more elapsed before Solon appeared and gave laws to Athens, though a city long famous for arms, arts, eloquence, and philosophy. And it was about five hundred years from the first founding of the celebrated Roman empire, and nearly three hundred years after Solon, before the first laws of that empire were imported from Greece in twelve tables, by ten ambassadors sent there for that purpose. But even when that empire had attained the summit of glory, and legislation was carried to great perfection, however well adapted to a government so extensive and complicate their laws might be, they were far from being worthy to be compared with the laws of Israel, as to the security of life, liberty, property, and public morals: and as to their religion, which was from the beginning interwoven with the state, instead of receiving any greater perfection from the increase of knowledge, wealth and power, it only became a more abundant congeries of ridiculous and detestable superstitions. Moreover; when the Roman empire was overwhelmed and destroyed by an inundation of barbarous nations, and many kingdoms were erected in Europe out of its ruins by the conquerors, laws were extinct under the feudal system; the will of the barons was a law for their vassals; and but a few centuries have past since kings began to introduce law into their courts of justice. And now, though legislation has been carried to such perfection in Great Britain, that land of knowledge and liberty, yet in a political and judicial view the laws of that kingdom may be charged with many great faults, which ought not to be copied: particularly, the tediousness, voluminous bulk, intricacy, barbarous language, and uncertain operation of many of them as to equity, ought to be avoided by legislators who wish for an easy and speedy course of justice among a free people. And perhaps our own courts might be so reformed as to prevent cases of inconsiderable value, and easy decision, from rising through all the stages of the law. Against these imperfections good provision was made in the law of Moses, and it might be much for our advantage to pay greater attention to that example.

Upon a review of what has been said, must it not appear quite unaccountable, that the Israelites should so speedily attain to such an height of good policy and legislation, beyond all other nations? Are we not constrained to acknowledge an immediate interposition and direction of heaven? Had the unexperienced multitude been left to themselves to draw up a system of civil and military government for themselves, it would have been entirely beyond their abilities to comprehend so complicated a subject; they must have committed innumerable mistakes, in attempting to introduce and establish it; they would have been in danger of jarring opinions, tumults, and insurrections; and probably before the design could be effected, discouragement and confusion would have forced them to surrender into the hands of despotism. But their God provided every thing necessary for their happiness, and nothing more was left to their own wisdom than to submit to his authority, and adhere strictly to his commands: by this, their reputation among the nations would have been equal to the excellency of their laws.

But now you may say, Why then were they not universally celebrated? Why did not princes and politicians from all parts of the world visit them, to learn maxims of polity from so well regulated a nation? Why did not

philosophers come, and enquire into that system of religion and morality which carried virtue to such an height of perfection? Surely a nation, of which all the parts were so firmly cemented, must be strong and formidable: a people, who enjoyed the most rational liberty, and yet were under the most voluntary and absolute subjection to authority, free from all the convulsions and revolutions which frequently arise from the raging folly of the populace, must become famous: a wise and impartial administration of justice, according to the most excellent laws, by which all were kept in perfect security and peace, could not but be admired: and the commerce of a people, whose morals were governed by the best precepts, whose word might be trusted, who practised no kind of fraud, and whose behaviour was always benevolent, sober, prudent, and sincere, must be highly valued by the world. Whereas on the contrary, the Israelites were often weak, distressed, and generally despised and hated by all their neighbours. The plain answer to this objection is—They never adhered in practice either to the principles of their civil polity or religion: but on their practice depended the prosperity and honor of the nation. They received their law from God, but they did not keep it. They neglected their government, corrupted their religion, and grew dissolute in their morals, and in such a situation no nation under heaven can prosper.

Let us view their state, in the first place, under the judges. Tho' the national senate was instituted for the assistance of Moses as captain-general and judge of the nation, and this was a plain intimation that in all succeeding times such a senate was necessary for the assistance of the supreme magistrate: yet after Joshua and the elders of his time were dead, it does not appear that they took the least care to fill their places. They left all the affairs of the nation to chance, or extraordinary providence, and had no chief commander, except when God in compassion to them in their troubles raised up judges for their deliverance. And as they suffered the general government to drop, we may well think them as careless of the government of the particular tribes. In each tribe, as we have observed, a government ought to have been kept up similar to the national authority, by the elders and prince of the tribe. But we find this remark repeatedly made in the book of Judges—*“In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes”*—that is in plain terms, there was no authority any where, but every man was left to act as he pleased. No wonder therefore if they were weak in council and war, and exposed on every side to the insults of their neighbours, being unable to unite in their own defence. This neglect of government was wholly inexcusable: for however they might plead, that Moses, and Joshua, and the seventy elders, were of God's immediate appointment, and that they had no warrant to fill up their places; they could not but know they had an undoubted right to provide for their own welfare, especially when there was so plain an intimation that the same government was to be continued. If they were at a loss what to do, they had the greatest oracle in the world among them, and they ought to have enquired of God, their king, how to proceed and what persons to choose. Nay, they were some times sensible enough of their right to appoint a chief commander, and even to make the command hereditary, as appears by the address to Gideon—*“Rule thou over us; both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also”*—by the choice which the Shechemites made of Abimelech to be their king; and by Jephtha's bargain with the Gileadites to be their head and captain, if he fought for them against the Ammonites. By all this we may plainly see that the general neglect of government is to be charged as the fault of the people.

And now we cannot wonder if courts of justice ceased, when the higher powers of government were wanting. These courts, which should have been continued in every walled city, dwindled away and came to nothing; crimes were unpunished, and the most abominable vices spread their infection through all ranks. No law was executed to deter men from murders, robberies, rapes, or any other kind of wickedness. This is evident by the case of the Levite whose concubine was abused to death by the mob of Benjamites at Gibeah: the city in general discovered no disposition to do justice upon the offenders; there were no judges near, to whom complaint might be made; nay, it seems the whole tribe were ready to abett the crime rather than punish it; nor was there any authority in the nation to take cognizance of the matter; and therefore the Levite was obliged to take a method, shocking to humanity, in order to excite the indignation of the other tribes, and bring their forces against the Benjamites to their destruction.

We have also good reason to think the military affairs of the nation were not in a much better state than the civil. They could not wholly omit the care of their militia, because they were continually exposed to wars in

their own defence. It was necessary to provide officers, and keep up some degree of discipline; but they were very deficient in this respect, especially as to superior command. In almost every battle, against the most contemptible of their neighbours, they were unsuccessful; and were ravaged, plundered, and brought under tribute by all in their turns, and delivered only when God mercifully interposed by raising up a general in an extraordinary way. On an alarm, instead of forming a regular army, they seem to have ran together suddenly from all quarters, without order, as if to stop a conflagration. Such disunited undirected force was never able to sustain a heavy attack, but gave every invader an easy victory.

But that which was the main force of all their disorder and misery, was their neglecting and corrupting that religion which God commanded. As long as those elders lived, who were with Joshua, and had seen all the great works of the Lord which he did for Israel, the people adhered to the worship of the true God as prescribed in the law: but when they were dead, the impressions which had been made by miracles wore off, as is natural; and they grew regardless of the worship of the sanctuary, gave scope to their own imaginations, and soon made a mixture of all the superstitions and idolatries of the heathen with the worship of Jehovah. They kept up no method of religious instruction; and as they grew more and more ignorant, they thought it too inconvenient to travel so often from all parts of the country, to offer sacrifices at the tabernacle, though it was very centrally placed at Shiloh, not much more than eighty miles distant from the remotest towns; but every man chose to worship nearer home: and so they made groves, and built altars for themselves, and soon set up images of Baal, Ashteroth, and other genteel deities which their neighbours worshipped. By these idols, however, they pretended to worship the true God, and brought sacrifices after their own hearts; for they imagined that all kinds of religion came much to the same thing, and whether precisely agreeable to the command or not, would be acceptable, if they were sincere. Thus Micah made images, and procured a priest in his own house, which the children of Dan afterwards took away, and fixed in their new conquered city, in the northern bounds of Canaan, where this idolatry continued until the ten tribes were carried into captivity; and Joash, the father of Gideon, had a grove, and an altar of Baal, for his own family; likewise Gideon himself, though highly honoured of God in being the deliverer of Israel from the Midianites, made an ephod, which was soon the occasion of superstitious worship, and drew him and the people from attending at the tabernacle.

Now by the foregoing view of the general state of the nation during the time of the judges, we may plainly see the reason why, instead of rising to fame by the perfection of their polity, religion, and morals, their character sunk into contempt. But let us see whether they conducted better afterwards, under their kings.

It was their crime to demand such a king as was like the kings of other nations, *i.e.* a king with the same absolute power, to command all according to his own pleasure. In this view God only was their king, and the head of the nation was only to be his vicegerent. Therefore as they had implicitly rejected the divine government, God gave them a king in his anger; the consequence of which was, the total loss of their republican form of government, and sad experience of the effects of despotic power. Indeed their religious establishment, which had been very much impaired in the days of the judges, was restored, and brought to its greatest glory, by David the most pious, and Solomon the wisest of kings; and during their reigns, the nation gained the height of grandeur; but no national senate was appointed, and the power of the kings continued to be despotic, and so the days of their prosperity were soon over. As soon as Rehoboam ascended the throne he openly avowed the most despotic principles, so that ten tribes revolted, and made Jeroboam their king. Jeroboam, out of policy, to prevent a reunion with Judah by means of the temple worship, placed two calves at the extremities of his kingdom, and persuaded the people to worship God by them instead of going to Jerusalem: and this false worship, together with a multitude of other idolatries introduced by this means, was the religion of the ten tribes, until they were captivated by the king of Assyria, and dispersed and lost among the nations. Nor did Rehoboam pay greater regard to the law of Moses; for he built high-places, and made images and groves on every high hill and under every green tree, and did according to all the abominations of the heathen; and in consequence of this, every kind of vice, and even sodomy, prevailed in the land. From this time the propensity of the people to idolatry increased, so that they readily followed the examples of succeeding bad kings, and it became a very difficult task for the best to make an effectual reformation. Nor is it to be wondered at that false

religion so easily gained ground; for the people grew very ignorant: no care was taken to instruct them, in their several cities, in the law of God; but, being without teachers, they were very little acquainted with their own religious institutions. For this reason when good king Jehoshaphat resolved upon a reformation in church and state, after having taken a circuit thro' his kingdom to

bring the people back to the Lord God of their fathers, he sent out some of his principal officers, with priests and levites, to teach the people in the cities of Judah; and these carried the book of the law with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught them that religion which God commanded by Moses.

It likewise appears by what immediately follows this account of his proceedings, that there had been a long omission of the administration of justice in the cities; that no courts had been kept up by preceeding kings, or such as were corrupt, in which the judges paid little regard to law and equity: for the king

set judges in the land, throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city, and said unto the judges, take heed what ye do, for ye judge not for man but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment:— wherefore now let the fear of Lord be upon you, take heed and do it, for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.

Repeated attempts were made by the few pious kings, to put a stop to the corruption of religion and morals; but all in vain; the people relapsed again and again into ignorance, idolatry, and wickedness: their vices had increased to the utmost degree of enormity in Jeremiah's time; and their complicated crimes at length brought upon them desolation and a long captivity.

And now let us just take a glance at their general state after the captivity in Babylon. When they returned to their own land they endeavored to conform their religion and government to the mosaic standard; idolatry was entirely purged out; they discovered great zeal for the law of their God and the instituted worship; they appointed a general senate of seventy elders, called by them the Sanhedrin, with a supreme magistrate at the head, for the government of the nation; and while their pious zeal continued they grew and prospered. But, according to the common course of things in the world, religion soon degenerated into mere formality, without proper regard to its principal intention, and became only a shadow of that delivered to their fathers; the affairs of state were badly administered, and the highest honors were gained by favor, bribery, or violence; hypocrisy was substituted in the room of the true fear of God, and the practice of righteousness; all the vices natural to mankind daily increased; and finally they filled up the measure of their sins by crucifying the Lord of Glory, and rejecting his gospel, for which they have been made monuments of the divine displeasure unto this day.

Therefore upon the whole view we see, that the Israelites never attained to that fame and dignity among the nations which their constitution encouraged them to expect, because they took little care to practice agreeably to the good statutes and judgments given them by Moses. Their constitution both of government and religion was excellent in writing, but was never exemplified in fact.

application

And now, my fellow citizens, and much honored fathers of the State, you may be ready to ask "*To what purpose is this long detail of antiquated history on this public occasion?*" I answer—Examples are better than precepts; and history is the best instructor both in polity and morals. I have presented you with the portrait of a nation, highly favoured by heaven with civil and religious institutions, who yet, by not improving their advantages, forfeited their blessings, and brought contempt and destruction on themselves. If I am not mistaken, instead of the twelve tribes of Israel, we may substitute the thirteen states of the American union, and see this application plainly offering itself, viz.—That as God in the course of his kind providence hath given you an

excellent constitution of government, founded on the most rational, equitable, and liberal principles, by which all that liberty is secured which a people can reasonably claim, and you are empowered to make righteous laws for promoting public order and good morals; and as he has moreover given you by his son Jesus Christ, who is far superior to Moses, a complete revelation of his will, and a perfect system of true religion, plainly delivered in the sacred writings; it will be your wisdom in the eyes of the nations, and your true interest and happiness, to conform your practice in the strictest manner to the excellent principles of your government, adhere faithfully to the doctrines and commands of the gospel, and practice every public and private virtue. By this you will increase in numbers, wealth, and power, and obtain reputation and dignity among the nations: whereas, the contrary conduct will make you poor, distressed, and contemptible.

The God of heaven hath not indeed visibly displayed the glory of his majesty and power before our eyes, as he came down in the sight of Israel on the burning mount; nor has he written with his own finger the laws of our civil polity: but the signal interpositions of divine providence, in saving us from the vengeance of a powerful irritated nation, from which we were unavoidably separated by their inadmissible claim of absolute parliamentary power over us; in giving us a Washington to be captain-general of our armies, in carrying us through the various distressing scenes of war and desolation, and making us twice triumphant over numerous armies, surrounded and captivated in the midst of their career; and finally giving us peace, with a large territory, and acknowledged independence; all these laid together fall little short of real miracles, and an heavenly charter of liberty for these United-States. And when we reflect, how wonderfully the order of these states was preserved when government was dissolved, or supported only by feeble props; with how much sobriety, wisdom, and unanimity they formed and received the diversified yet similar constitutions in the different states; with what prudence, fidelity, patience, and success, the Congress have managed the general government, under the great disadvantages of a very imperfect and impotent confederation; we cannot but acknowledge that God hath graciously patronized our cause, and taken us under his special care, as he did his ancient covenant people.

Or we may consider the hand of God in another view. Wisdom is the gift of God, and social happiness depends on his providential government; therefore, if these states have framed their constitutions with superior wisdom, and secured their natural rights, and all the advantages of society, with greater precaution than other nations, we may with good reason affirm that God hath given us our government; that he hath taught us good statutes and judgments, tending to make us great and respectable in the view of the world. Only one thing more remains to complete his favor toward us; which is, the establishment of a general government, as happily formed as our particular constitutions, for the perfect union of these states. Without this, all that we glory in is lost; but if this should be effected, we may say with the greatest joy, "*God hath done great things for us.*" The general form of such a constitution hath already been drawn up, and presented to the people, by a convention of the wisest and most celebrated patriots in the land: eight of the states have approved and accepted it, with full testimonies of joy: and if it passes the scrutiny of the whole, and recommends itself to be universally adopted, we shall have abundant reason to offer elevated thanksgivings to the supreme Ruler of the universe for a government completed under his direction.*

Now our part is to make a wise improvement of what God grants us, and not neglect or despise our distinguishing privileges: for the best constitution, badly managed, will soon fall, and be changed into anarchy or tyranny. Without constant care of your families, you will have bad servants, and your estates will be wasted. So we must pay constant attention to the great family, if we desire to be a free and happy people.

The power in all our republics is acknowledged to originate in the people: it is delegated by them to every magistrate and officer; and to the people all in authority are accountable, if they deviate from their duty, and abuse their power. Even the man, who may be advanced to the chief command of these United States, according to the proposed constitution; whose office resembles that of a king in other nations, which has always been thought so sacred that they have had no conception of bringing a king before the bar of justice; even he depends on the choice of the people for his temporary and limited power, and will be liable to impeachment, trial, and disgrace for any gross misconduct. On the people, therefore, of these United-States it depends whether wise

men, or fools, good or bad men, shall govern them; whether they shall have righteous laws, a faithful administration of government, and permanent good order, peace, and liberty; or, on the contrary, feel insupportable burdens, and see all their affairs run to confusion and ruin.

Therefore, I will now lift up my voice, and cry aloud to the people; to the people of this state in particular, whom I will consider as present by their representatives and rulers, and the congregation here collected from various towns. Rise! Rise to fame among all nations, as a wise and understanding people! political life and death are set before you; be a free, numerous, well ordered, and happy people! The way has been plainly set before you; if you pursue it, your prosperity is sure; but if not, distress and ruin will overtake you.

Preserve your government with the utmost attention and solicitude, for it is the remarkable gift of heaven. From year to year be careful in the choice of your representatives, and all the higher powers of government. Fix your eyes upon men of good understanding, and known honesty; men of knowledge, improved by experience; men who fear God, and hate covetousness; who love truth and righteousness, and sincerely wish the public welfare. Beware of such as are cunning rather than wise; who prefer their own interest to every thing; whose judgment is partial, or fickle; and whom you would not willingly trust with your own private interests. When meetings are called for the choice of your rulers, do not carelessly neglect them, or give your votes with indifference, just as any party may persuade, or a sordid treat tempt you; but act with serious deliberation and judgment, as in a most important matter, and let the faithful of the land serve you. Let not men openly irreligious and immoral become your legislators; for how can you expect good laws to be made by men who have no fear of God before their eyes, and who boldly trample on the authority of his commands? And will not the example of their impiety and immorality defeat the efficacy of the best laws which can be made in favour of religion and virtue? If the legislative body are corrupt, you will soon have bad men for counsellors, corrupt judges, unqualified justices, and officers in every department who will dishonor their stations; the consequence of which will be murmurs and complaints from every quarter. Let a superior character point out the man who is to be your head; for much depends on his inspection and care of public affairs and the influence of his judgment, advice and conduct, although his power is circumscribed: in this choice therefore be always on your guard against parties, and the methods taken to make interest for unworthy men, and let distinguished merit always determine your vote. And when all places in government are filled with the best men you can find, behave yourselves as good subjects; obey the laws; cheerfully submit to such taxation as the necessities of the public call for; give tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, and honor to whom honor, as the gospel commands you. Never give countenance to turbulent men, who wish to distinguish themselves, and rise to power, by forming combinations and exciting insurrections against government: for this can never be the right way to redress real grievances, since you may not only prefer complaints and petitions to the court, but have the very authority, which you think has been misused, in your own power, and may very shortly place it in other hands. How happy was it for this state, that the insurrection, attempted here two years ago, was so seasonably and with so little difficulty suppressed, when the neighbouring state was brought into such a difficult and critical situation by the distracted populace, and has now scarcely recovered from that violent political paroxysm.

I call upon you also to support schools in all your towns, that the rising generation may not grow up in ignorance. Grudge not any expence proportionate to your abilities. It is a debt you owe to your children, and that God to whom they belong; a necessary evidence of your regard for their present and future happiness, and of your concern to transmit the blessings you yourselves enjoy to future generations. The human mind without early and continual cultivation grows wild and savage: knowledge must be instilled as its capacities gradually enlarge, or it cannot expand and extend its sphere of activity. Without instruction men can have no knowledge but what comes from their own observation and experience, and it will be a long time before they can be acquainted even with things most necessary for the support and comfort of the present life. Leave your children untaught to read, write, cypher, &c. teach them no trade, or husbandry; let them grow up wholly without care; and they will be more fit for a savage than civil life, and whatever inheritance you may think to leave them will be of no advantage. But, on the contrary, train them up in the fear of God, in an acquaintance with his word, and all such useful knowledge as your abilities will allow, and they will soon know how to provide for themselves,

perhaps may take care of their aged parents, and fill the various stations in life with honor and advantage. Look round and see the growing youth: they are to succeed in your stead; government and religion must be continued by them; from among these will shortly rise up our legislators, judges, ministers of the gospel, and officers of every rank. Can you think of this, and not promote schools, academies, and colleges? Can you leave the youth uninstructed in any thing which may prepare them to act their part well in the world? Will you suffer ignorance to spread its horrid gloom over the land? An ignorant people will easily receive idolatry for their religion, and must bow their necks to the tyrant's yoke, because they are incapable of using rational liberty. Will you then consign over your posterity to foolish and abominable superstitions instead of religion, and to be the slaves of despotism, when a small proportion of the produce of your labours will make them wise, free, and happy?

Will you hear me patiently a little farther, while I say one thing more of very great importance, which I dare not suppress. I call upon you to preserve the knowledge of God in the land, and attend to the revelation written to us from heaven. If you neglect or renounce that religion taught and commanded in the holy scriptures, think no more of freedom, peace, and happiness; the judgments of heaven will pursue you. Religion is not a vain thing for you because it is your life: it has been the glory and defence of New-England from the infancy of the settlements; let it be also our glory and protection. I mean no other religion than what is divinely prescribed, which God himself has delivered to us with equal evidence of his authority, and even superior to that given to Israel, and which he has as strictly commanded us to receive and observe. The holy scriptures are given as the only rule of our faith, worship and obedience, and if we are guided by this perfect rule, we shall keep the way of truth and righteousness, and obtain the heavenly glory. We are now no more at liberty to draw up schemes of religion for ourselves, according to our own deceitful reasonings and vain imaginations, or to comply with the traditions and commands of men, or fall in with the refinements of human wisdom and the fashionable sentiments of the world, than Israel was to substitute modes of serving God different from what he had expressly required. We must believe what the Son of God, who made the worlds, and was sent by the Father with a proclamation of mercy to mankind, has declared to us. He died to redeem men from the servitude of sin, and reconcile them to God that they may be raised to life eternal; and he is appointed to be like a second Moses, the captain of our salvation to conduct us to heaven: to him therefore we must hearken in all things. The principal doctrines of his gospel are quite simple, plain and important. He teaches us that the commands of God reach to the inward thoughts, principles, and affections of the heart, as well as the outward conduct, and are as pure and perfect as the divine nature; that according to the laws of his moral government all men universally are sinners, and must repent in order to obtain mercy; that remission of sins is obtained only by believing on his name, and through his blood shed for us on the cross; that his disciples must receive his word, and obey whatsoever he hath commanded, endeavoring to be holy in all manner of conversation and avoid all the vices and corruptions of the world; that there will be a resurrection from the dead both of the just and unjust; and a day of solemn judgment, when all mankind must give an account of their conduct in this world, and receive their sentence from him whom the Father hath constituted to be the judge; and that in consequence of their sentence mankind will depart into very opposite states; the wicked into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal, the present visible system of nature being then dissolved in flames. In the belief of these plain truths, and that worship and obedience connected with them, the religion of christians consists. As to worship, no multiplied forms, and punctilious ceremonies are prescribed, which only serve to throw a veil over the mind; no certain modes are made necessary; but we must worship God, who is a spirit, in spirit and in truth, by prayer and praise, with love and fear, hope and joy. For such worship christians are united into societies called churches; and are required to assemble every Lord's day, that they may glorify God with one heart and voice, and be instructed and edified by his word, and the two only ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper; which are very simple, but well adapted to the nature and design of our religion.

The christian religion, therefore, is confined to no particular nation, sect, or denomination; but is designed to call all men to repentance and newness of life; to encourage their hope in the mercy of God, thro' the only mediator Jesus Christ; persuade them to the most cheerful, persevering obedience; and comfort them, under all the labours and sorrows of the world, and the natural dread of death, with the assurance of a glorious immortality. This religion may be believed and practised, so as to answer the main purposes of it, under the

various forms in which christian churches now appear: just as the principal ends of civil government may be obtained under the various constitutions which have taken place in different nations, however one may be much more eligible than another.

Therefore, regard not men who are continually crying up their own sect, and employing their utmost zeal and art to proselyte men to their party: they aim to strengthen themselves by your numbers and purses, more than to save your souls. If any say, lo here is Christ! or lo there! go not after them: for wherever his word abides, there is Christ; in and by his word he is already with us, and dwells in the hearts of believers. Listen to no enthusiasts, who instead of enlightening confound your understandings; and substitute folly, nonsense, and hypocritical grimace, in the room of a clear manifestation of truth and conformity of heart and life to the gospel. Take heed of imbibing the licentious principles of men who affect to render all religion doubtful, by persuading you that every kind of religion is equally acceptable to God if a man is but sincere in it; for this renders revelation useless. Beware of receiving new opinions, which militate with the plain and obvious meaning of the word of Christ, however they may pretend to be clearer discoveries of truth, and more comfortable and beneficial to mankind: but adhere to the written word, taken in the most natural sense, without forced allegories, whimsical constructions, or torturing criticisms; especially hold fast those doctrines which meet your eye in almost every page of the new testament. Read and meditate in the word of God day and night, and diligently attend on the public ministrations which Christ hath appointed in his church; and consider that as a true church where the truth as it is in Jesus is preached, and his plain institutions observed, whatever the particular form or denomination may be, avoiding all contentions and uncharitable separations. Be earnest to procure ministers, who preach the uncorrupted doctrines of the gospel, in all your towns: let none of your parishes continue vacant thro' indifference, negligence, or covetousness; and never withhold from faithful ministers a comfortable support. When we look round and see so many churches destitute of teachers, contenting themselves in the total neglect of all divine institutions, have we not reason to fear that God is departing from us? And if our religion is given up, all the liberty we boast of will soon be gone; a profane and wicked people cannot hope for divine blessings, but it may be easily foretold that *“evil will befall them in the latter days.”*

While I thus earnestly exhort you to religion, it must be understood as equally an exhortation to every branch of morality; for without this all religion is vain. That excellent sentence of the wise king ought forever to be in our minds—*“Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people.”* Sobriety, good order, honesty, fidelity, industry, frugality, and the like virtues must prevail; public crimes against person or property must be restrained and punished; or a people cannot be happy. Therefore let all maintain rectitude of conduct, and practise every thing virtuous and praise-worthy among their neighbours, and be just and true in all their intercourse and commerce. Unite in assisting the government in the execution of all good laws: and let all the members of the body politic consider that their own happiness depends on the welfare of the whole.

My subject hath lead me into this long and earnest address to the people. But it suggests some things which may properly be addressed to this honorable court. Will you hear me patiently, while with the utmost respect, I say a few words to excite the wise reflections of your own minds.

You will consider that you assemble from time to time as fathers of the large family, which depends on you to take care of its general welfare, and that no local views ought to govern you, nor partial instructions of your constituents bind you to act contrary to the clear conviction or your own minds. You will be cautious of forming parties for any selfish purposes, and of being too hasty in determining important matters, or too slow in your proceedings when business is urgent. In order to form a wise judgment of every thing that comes before you, you are sensible of the propriety of examining things to the bottom, attending patiently to every argument on both sides, and asking conscience, rather than any friend, what ought to be done. Like frugal housholders you will save all unnecessary expences, and take good care of the treasury; but not suffer the faithful servants of the state to be so stinted in their reward as to discourage them from their duty. Lay no grievous burdens on the people beyond their abilities; but take the earliest, easiest, and most righteous methods to reduce and pay off the public debt, unhappily involved in all the perplexities occasioned by boundless emissions of depreciating paper

notes. Be liberal, yet frugal in grants of money, according to the exigencies of the public. Let no laws be wanting which good order, and the proper administration of government and justice require; but make no law which establisheth iniquity. And may I propose it, as worthy of your consideration, whether some reformation may not be necessary as to processes in our courts of justice: whether appeals from court to court are not allowed beyond reason and equity, in the plainest cases, and of too trivial value: by which some of our courts are made mere vehicles, justice is delayed, and the law made unnecessarily expensive, tedious and vexatious; and whether some method may not be thought of to determine the judgment of causes in lower or higher courts in proportion to their value and importance. I beg leave to say one word as to religion. With respect to articles of faith or modes of worship, civil authority have no right to establish religion. The people ought to choose their own ministers, and their own denomination, as our laws now permit them; but as far as religion is connected with the morals of the people, and their improvement in knowledge, it becomes of great importance to the state; and legislators may well consider it as part of their concern for the public welfare, to make provision that all the towns may be furnished with good teachers, that they may be empowered to make valid contracts, and that the fulfilment of such contracts should be secured against the fickle humours of men, who are always ready to shift from sect to sect, or make divisions in parishes that they may get free from all legal obligations to their ministers. Perhaps a little addition to the law already in force in this state might sufficiently secure the continuance of religious instruction, enlarge rather than diminish liberty of conscience, and prevent envyings, contentions, and crumbling into parties. Will you permit me now to pray in behalf of the people, that all the departments of government may be constantly filled with the wisest and best men; that his excellency the president may have the assistance of an able and faithful council; that the administration of justice may be in the hands of judges and justices well qualified for their offices, who will not take bribes, or in any manner pervert judgment; in a word, that the constitution established may in every respect be well supported by your care, and that the people may know the blessings of good government by the union of your counsels, and the wisdom of your proceedings. May the Almighty King of kings always be in the midst of you, direct and assist you, impress your hearts with his fear, and grant present and future blessings in reward of your fidelity.

And now if I have delivered words of truth, agreeably to my text; and pointed out the sure way to be a prosperous and happy people; may these things sink deep into your hearts, and be accompanied with the divine blessing! May the general government of these United States, when established, appear to be the best which the nations have yet known, and be exalted by uncorrupted religion and morals! And may the everlasting gospel diffuse its heavenly light, and spread righteousness, liberty, and peace, thro' the whole world.

amen

Soon after this sermon was delivered, the convention of the state of New-Hampshire, met according to adjournment, and on the twenty first day of June accepted the proposed general Constitution of government. This being the ninth state which has acceded to this form of national union, it will be carried into effect; and there is no reason to doubt of the speedy accession of all the other states, which are now debating on the important question. May all rejoice in the Lord, who has formed us into a nation, and honour him as our judge, lawgiver, and king, who hath saved us, and will save us from all enemies and fears, if we thankfully receive and rightly improve his great mercies.