

AMERICA AND THE HAND OF GOD

Blessed in the nation whose God is the Lord
Psalm 33:12a

I began to enjoy history more when I learned the difference between a historian and a history buff. A history buff learns names and dates, thinking he is learning history. He is only learning trivia. A historian studies the movements, the underlying causes, the significant changes over a period of time. Since I have left school and the history buffs, I have developed an enjoyment for history. I have two areas of historical interest. One is the local history of where I live and the second is the Revolutionary War and the early days of our nation. In particular, I have enjoyed learning about the spiritual side of the founding of our nation. With that in mind let me share with you some thoughts about *America and the Hand of God*.

Let's begin with a quote from John Wingate Thornton, who wrote only 85 years after the Revolution. "Focusing on the political and economic reasons for the Revolution, to the exclusion of the religious forces at work, distorts history."¹ I would encourage you to read about the Revolution with an eye on the hand of God. Three books are highly recommended: *Yankee Doodle Went to Church* by James Adams, *The Light and The Glory* by Peter Marshall and David Manuel², and its sequel *From Sea to Shining Sea*.³

As you read and study these you will see that we Americans are living evidence of the truth of Psalm 33. We are blessed because the Lord has been our God. This was true of Israel. As long as they followed God, they were blessed. When they turned from God and His commands, He sent the Babylonians to conquer them. They thought that they were God's special people who could never be defeated. They were wrong. When they ceased to follow God, they ceased to live under His protection and He disciplined them. They lost their status as a great nation.

The same could be said of Great Britain. When England was led by Godly men who looked to the Lord for their guidance, England prospered. They sent missionaries and settlers around the globe. It was said that the sun never set on the British Empire. But when there arose leaders who were more interested in self and growing their own kingdom, the empire fell apart.

The same is true for our own nation. When we step aside from the leadership of the Lord God Almighty, we step aside from greatness. Only when we have leaders who put God first, will we be great. The early leaders knew this truth. In 1776 when men gathered in Philadelphia and signed the document declaring the thirteen colonies to be free, it was freedom from England not freedom from God. If anything this was done with a great reliance on God.

Consider the *Declaration of Independence*. We should all know how it begins. We should learn that in High School.

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitles them. . . .[underline supplied]

¹James L. Adams. *Yankee Doodle Went to Church: The Righteous Revolution of 1776*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1989. p. 27.

²Peter Marshall and David Manuel. *The Light And The Glory*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1980.

³Peter Marshall and David Manuel. *From Sea To Shining Sea*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1986.

We know how it goes on to speak of how men are endowed with certain unalienable rights. Rights from which we can not be alienated. Rights with which we have been endowed by our creator. Then that great declaration concludes with these words:

WE, THEREFORE, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by the Authority of the good people of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these Colonies are, and or a Right ought to be, Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, . . . And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.
[underline supplied]

These men were intelligent men. They knew that a nation apart from God would not long endure, so in the very document that established our separate identity as a people, they affirmed their reliance on the Lord.

It had not always been this way in the colonies. We think of America as a place where men came for religious freedom. But the truth is religious freedom was a long time coming to America.

History credits Christopher Columbus as the man who discovered America. Did you know that his very name “Christopher” means “light-bearer”. When he set sail seeking a shorter route to the far east, it was not for riches. Those who backed him might have this in mind, but Columbus was looking for a quicker way to get missionaries to distant lands. He felt that he was acting under the leadership of God, who had called him to “carry the light of Christ into the darkness of undiscovered heathen lands.”⁴ He did not envision a new nation. Others sought the economic advantages his discovery presented.

When those who followed him came to conquer, they sought the gold and riches of the land. They however did know enough to bring with them the Franciscan and Dominican priests. These individual did seek to convert the natives.

The early English settlers also sought the wealth of the land. Jamestown is an example of such. It is interesting that it did not survive in a relatively stable climate, whereas the harsh winters of New England did not wipe out the pilgrims. But even the pilgrims did not come with pure religious freedom in mind. Many who came to America sought religious freedom for themselves, yet persecuted those of other denominations.

No, the concept of the freedom to worship the Lord as one saw fit was not brought to America, it was born in America. It came out of a spiritual event that swept the nation. This is known as the Great Awakening. It was a time when men and women came to the Lord in great numbers. Men like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield preacher with Holy Spirit filled power. It is said that Whitefield was so persuasive that even Ben Franklin gave an offering. Apparently that was some feat. The result of this First Great Awakening was two-fold.

The first result was the salvation of many people. God was now given proper place in their lives. They came to realize that they could no longer be devoted to riches, pleasure, or self.

⁴Marshall, *Light and Glory*, p. 31.

God must rule. In fact, one of the catch phrases of the Great Awakening and of the following Revolution was “No king but King Jesus.”

The second result was a coming together of the people across the colonies. This worked in two ways. One was the coming together spiritually. The people continued to hold dear their preferences as Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Independents, Seceders, Old Sides, New Sides, and other denominations. But they began to see themselves as a part of the larger Kingdom of God. Instead of staying in their group, they would gather together to hear the traveling preacher when he came to town. They began to see themselves not as separated, but as common servants in one kingdom.

It was at this time that our own Baptist denomination began to grow. People finding God in these meetings realized that the infant baptism they had been given was not sufficient for salvation. They were introduced to the idea of a personal relationship with God and sought others who believed likewise. Baptist churches were where they gathered.

A second coming together was geographical. Originally there was great rivalry among the colonies. Individually they were loyal to their colony and also to their sections. But when the same preachers spoke in the northern, middle, and southern colonies, the people heard the same message. They began to see that they had more in common than they had first thought. The concept of thirteen colonies working together began to grow.

This was the work of God as he laid the foundation for a new nation. He laid this foundation in the churches and hearts of the people. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.

This does not mean that it was easy to form a new nation. It is not easy to break with the past. Especially is this true when people are returning to the Word of God. The scriptures teach loyalty to the sovereign and revolution is the ultimate disloyalty. The men had to think long and hard about what they were doing. They gave evidence of this in the Declaration of Independence, “Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes.”

But God gave American men who were able to see the wisdom of a new nation, and He empowered them in their efforts to create it. They needed this power from God for Satan raged against the new nation. He knew the power of freedom to worship and fought to defeat it. But despite his best efforts, the people of God prevailed because they followed the Lord.

Rev. Samuel Landon President of Harvard College, preached, “If God be for us, who can be against us?”. He then called for solemn fasts and repentance. He concluded, “In the name of our God, we will set up our banners.”⁵

Ethan Allen, leader of the Green Mountain Boys, when he attacked Fort Ticonderoga called on Captain Delapace to surrender. Delapace asked by what authority this demand was made. Allen replied, “In the Name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress.”⁶

George Washington, who wrote his own prayer book, included these words:

Let my heart, therefore, gracious God, be so affected with the glory and majesty of (Thine Honor) that I may not do mine own works, but wait on Thee, and discharge those weighty duties which Thou requirest of men. . .”⁷

⁵Ibid., 278.

⁶Ibid., 276.

⁷Ibid., 278.

With the power of God our nation was founded. There have been several occasions when the power of God was manifest in nature to the benefit of our nation. One such time was in October, 1781. God sent a storm that cut off the last chance for escape that Cornwallis had. This resulted in his surrender to Washington and victory for the colonies.

Later our leaders would realize that a federation of colonies would not be strong enough to survive. This resulted in the adoption of the present constitution. This constitution recognized the need for checks and balances. The early leaders did not see the citizens as perfect people who would always do right. They had been taught that all sin and fall short of the glory of God. In order to curb this selfishness, they created a government with three branches. The Legislative Branch would enact the laws, the Executive Branch would enforce the laws, and the Judicial Branch would interpret the laws. Our history books will tell you that on the first Wednesday in March, 1789, George Washington was inaugurated and this constitution went into effect. What few, if any, textbooks will tell you is that this concept was founded in the word of God. Isaiah 33:22 (NAS)says:

For the Lord is our Judge,
The Lord is our lawgiver,
The Lord is our king;
He will save us.

He is our judge, the judicial branch; He is our lawgiver, the legislative branch; and He is our king, the executive branch. Our whole government is based on the word of God.

Through the years our nation has seen the blessings of following God and has experienced times when He was ignored. We have had wars, even among ourselves, depressions, physical disasters. We have also had a Second Great Awakening and times of revival throughout the land. God has been with us all the time.

We have seen resurgences of patriotism. And times when Americans have not thought well of their nation. We have seen Kate Smith be given the Medal of Freedom for her singing of "God Bless America". We have been lifted up by others singing the national anthem. And we have stood as we sang "I'm Proud to be an American."

But in this all we need to remember that we are great for only one reason, because the Lord is great. To turn away from God brings destruction. And America has turned away from God.

We have allowed Satan to run wild in our nation. The Ten Commandments are mocked and hidden away. The most dangerous place in our nation is the mother's womb. People are afraid of lawsuits so they refuse to witness, pray, or speak of God in public places. And the only group in America that it is legal to discriminate against is the evangelical Christian.

If America is going to last as a nation, it must return to God. We must learn that God has never judged a nation on its economy, its school system, its industry. God judges a nation on its morals, its relationship to Him. We must learn this truth and elect men and women who put God first.

George Washington said, "The people know it is impossible to rightly govern without God and the Bible." John Adams said, "Our Constitution was made for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other."⁸

⁸Adams, 205.

At all levels of government, we need to set aside leaders who ignore God and elect those who follow him. But we also need to be followers of God ourselves. We are the United States. We are the nation “of the people, by the people, for the people.”

Let me share with you a quote in closing. This was written by Alexis de Tocqueville when he visited the United States in the nineteenth century.

I sought for the greatness and genius of American in her commodious harbors and ample rivers, and it was not there. I sought of the greatness and genius of America in here fertile fields and boundless forests and it was not there. I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her rich mines and her vast world commerce, and it was not there. I sought for the greatness and genius of American in her public school system and her institutions of learning, and it was not there. I sought of the greatness and genius of America in her democratic congress and her matchless constitution, and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of American and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

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Psalm 33:12a

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