

Political Hebraism's Involvement and Significance in the American Founding

Master of Arts in History Thesis

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## Chapter One – Hebraism and American Historiography

Ideas influence the way people think and eventually how people act. Ideas were integral in both sparking the American Revolution and informing those who crafted the founding documents. It is a contested position to state that the United States had a Christian founding. The conversation is more complex than if the U.S. was founded on Christianity or not. Many point to Jefferson as a prime example that the founding fathers were not Christian. But it must also be recognized that Jefferson interacted with and was subsequently influenced, at least to some degree, by Christianity. At one point Jefferson wrote to his friend Charles Thomson about the “precious morsel of ethics” that he witnessed in the teaching of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Jefferson, along with other Revolutionary figures, may not have been Christians, yet it should be recognized that Christian ideas, while not the sole influence during the Revolution, were significant nonetheless.

Many people were instrumental in the American Revolution and in the creation of the country’s founding documents. As such, it is important to remember that these individuals lived in communities, often attended churches, went to plays, listened to sermons, and read various literature; understanding their culture, the things that shaped predominant worldviews of people in the 1770s and 1780s, is both critical and complex. Such complexity can be witnessed in something as simple as a list of books for purchase from William Strahan to

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jefferson, “Thomas Jefferson to Charles Thomson, January 9, 1816.” *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. James P. McClure and J. Jefferson Looney, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008-2019).

Benjamin Franklin that contains works from moral philosophy, the making of common salt, horses' diets, to Voltaire's *Elements of Newtonian Philosophy*, and Lowman's *Dissertation on the Hebrew Government*.<sup>2</sup>

Roughly one generation before the Founding Fathers embarked on the works that would cement their legacy lived another monumental group of men. These were the men who taught and preached during the Great Awakening. Great Awakening leaders preached to crowds in the field and were also leading scholars and teachers at universities. Preachers of the Awakening were men like Samuel Davies who would cross paths with Patrick Henry. Influential men of the Awakening were those like George Whitefield who would form a friendship with Benjamin Franklin. These and others such as Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennent, and many more taught and preached a great deal; a portion of their teaching included a focus on teaching from the Old Testament. Teachers and preachers of the Great Awakening left a widespread impact on the American Colonies. A knowledge of the Bible and awareness of the Jewish political system is a byproduct of the Great Awakening. It is appropriate then to attempt to grasp how founders and religious leaders during the Revolution understood the Hebrew structure of government as revealed in the Old Testament. Once it is observed that the Hebraic political system was one of great influence, the task of understanding why it was of importance can be undertaken.

This thesis is not arguing that America was founded on Christianity. It is also not advocating that political Hebraism was the sole philosophy that the founders were utilizing. Investigating the influence of the Old Testament civic structure, or political Hebraism, serves to recognize a

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<sup>2</sup> William Strahan, "To Benjamin Franklin from William Strahan, 26 August 1752." *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, Vol 4, July 1, 1750 through June 30, 1753, (ed. Leonard W. Labaree. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961. *Founders Online, National Archives*).

significant influence on founders that has been either unnoticed or under appreciated.

Exploration of this topic is needed to better understand why Samuel Langdon would preach before a general court in Concord and advocate that the Hebraic political structure should be “...considered as a pattern to the world in all ages; and from [the Hebrews] we may learn what will exalt our character.”<sup>3</sup> Not only that, but while Samuel Langdon preached for political Hebraism, John Adams would mention that the Hebrew government, “...instituted by God, had a judge, the great Sanhedrin, and general assemblies of the people.”<sup>4</sup> With examples like these it can be established that the study of the Hebraic political structure was a significant influence during the Revolution. Political Hebraism’s importance can be better appreciated in light of the predominant Christian worldview through which these leaders assigned value to ideas.

Terms such as Hebrew republicanism, Hebraic studies, political Hebraism, Christian Hebraism, or biblical republicanism may be confusing and possibly misleading. Political Hebraism is a term used to describe the investigation of the Hebrew Bible as a political text.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, some have suggested more precise definitions of political Hebraism, Christian Hebraism, lexical Hebraism, and cultural Hebraism. Kalman Neuman discusses the specifics of these terms with how others have used them in his article, “Political Hebraism and the Early Modern ‘Respublica Hebraeorum’: On Defining the Field.” However, Neuman, along with Eran Shalev, and Fania Oz-Salzberger communicate that political Hebraism should be understood as

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Langdon, *The Republic of the Israelites An Example to the American States*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> John Adams, *A Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, 147.

<sup>5</sup> Kalman Neuman, “Political Hebraism and the Early Modern ‘Respublica Hebraeorum’: On Defining the Field.” *Hebraic Political Studies*, 59; see also, Eran Shalev, “A Perfect Republic: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788,” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol 82, No 2 (June 2009), 235-263.

using the Tanach (Hebrew Bible) as a political document “whether or not the author read those texts in the original Hebrew.”<sup>6</sup>

Israel’s political history is recorded in the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 and 2 Samuel, and Judges.<sup>7</sup> Investigating these portions of scripture as a political text began in a noticeable manner late in the Protestant Reformation.<sup>8</sup> Calvinists from New England to the Iberian Peninsula and the establishment of the Dutch republic defined their “theopolitical enterprises as “new Israel’s.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, George Washington referenced the, “... Deity who long since delivering the Hebrews” from their captivity would exercise his “providential agency” in the establishment of the United States.<sup>10</sup> Washington and other founders, including John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, were familiar with these biblical texts, how people used texts to create comparisons with the nation of Israel, and the resulting political theory that had emerged after the Reformation.

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<sup>6</sup> Kalman Neuman, “Political Hebraism and the Early Modern ‘Respublica Hebraeorum’: On Defining the Field.” *Hebraic Political Studies*, 59; see also, Eran Shalev, “A Perfect Republic: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788,” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol 82, No 2 (June 2009), 235-263; Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism,” *Hebraic Political Studies*, Vol 1, No 5 (Fall 2005) 586-592, ref, 569.

<sup>7</sup> Eran Shalev, “A Perfect Republic: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788,” *The New England Quarterly*, 237; Other ancient sources include Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, which restated that history. Josephus’s works were printed in America between 1773 and 1800 in eight editions; Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism,” *Hebraic Political Studies*, Vol 1, No 5 (Fall 2005) 586-592, ref, 569.

<sup>8</sup> Eran Shalev, “A Perfect Republic: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788,” *The New England Quarterly*, 235.

<sup>9</sup> See Eran Shalev, “A Perfect Republic: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788,” *The New England Quarterly*, 237; see also Miriam Bodian, “The Biblical ‘Jewish Republic’ and the Dutch ‘New Israel’ in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Thought,” *Hebraic Political Studies*, Vol 1, No 2 (2006); 186-202.

<sup>10</sup> George Washington, “From George Washington to the Savannah, Ga. Hebrew Congregation, 14 June 1790.” *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*, vol 5, 16 January 1790 – 30 June 1790.

Study of Israel's political history produced several major academic works between 1546 and 1710.<sup>11</sup> Bodian states political Hebraism "flourished" for around a century and a half, "roughly between Bodin and Locke, with Machiavelli as a significant predecessor." She indicates that its climax was in England with John Selden, John Milton, and James Harrington who "endowed it with hands-on political significance."<sup>12</sup> Insight created through political Hebraism goes beyond the Revolutionaries' study of scripture as a political text. Scholars who have connected political Hebraism as significant to Milton, Harrington, Locke, and others buttress its significance to the American Revolution through previous scholars such as J.G.A. Pocock, who wrote *The Machiavellian Moment*, a work that points to Machiavelli as instrumental in the influence of American Framers.<sup>13</sup>

While political Hebraism is the study of the Hebrew Bible as a political text, it is not necessarily represented by one interpretation of that text. The specific areas of scripture that record Israel's political history have been interpreted both as advocating for a more republican structure of government and for a monarchical form of government. While recognizing that political Hebraism was a significant influence on Revolutionaries, it did not necessarily create a unified vision at one time in the colonies. In fact, John Adams referenced a conversation he had with Thomas Paine about Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense*. Adams, in a conversation with Paine in 1776, had told Paine that his "...reasoning from the Old Testament was ridiculous, and I could hardly think him sincere. At this he laughed, and said he had taken his Ideas in that part

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<sup>11</sup> Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment*, 43; Eran Shalev, "A Perfect Republic: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788," *The New England Quarterly*, 237.

<sup>12</sup> Miriam Bodian, "The Biblical 'Jewish Republic' and the Dutch 'New Israel' in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Thought," *Hebraic Political Studies*, 569.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 570.

from John Milton: and then expressed a Contempt of the Old Testament and indeed of the Bible at large, which surprised me.”<sup>14</sup> This dialogue demonstrates that influential thinkers of the period utilized the Old Testament as a political text and recognized the debate others like Milton had on the same subjects. People drew different conclusions from their studies and did not feel required to identify as Christian while utilizing the Hebrew Bible as a source of their arguments.

Eran Shalev says that biblical republicanism, a more specific term within political Hebraism that interprets the Old Testament as supporting the political concept of classical republicanism, has been “largely unnoticed” and that it should “significantly expand our understanding” of how the founding generation constructed their “political worldviews.”<sup>15</sup> While this topic adds value and depth to the historiography of the field, it also is relevant for the modern audience. Current culture continues to move further and further from a biblical worldview as the predominant worldview becomes more reliant on post modernity and humanism. This topic is important to help people understand the particulars of ideas valuable to the great thinkers of the founding, even if those ideas may not be held by the majority of the public today. In fact, the changing worldviews of modern people make grasping the perspectives of the founders even more critical.

Patricia Bonomi describes details of the eighteenth-century that help those living in twenty-first century better understand the cultural gaps between the founding period with that of today in her book *Under the Cope of Heaven*. Bonomi says that while modern cities may not

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<sup>14</sup> John Adams, *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 3: 333.

<sup>15</sup> Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament As a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War*, 16.

symbolize religion, in the eighteenth-century, “—in city, village, and countryside—the idiom of religion penetrated all discourse, underlay all thought, marked all observances, gave meaning to every public and private crisis.”<sup>16</sup> Bonomi explains that preachers were essentially the “popular entertainment” of the eighteenth-century. “When not listening to their preachers’ words,” people were reading their sermons.<sup>17</sup> A study done by Donald Lutz supports the comment of Bonomi by stating that, “...at least 10% of all pamphlets published” during the founding period were printed sermons.<sup>18</sup>

Up to 1765, more literature such as sermons, pious literature, devotional material, and related work was published than material on political science, history, and law combined. Bonomi goes on to say that “...even during the Revolutionary era devotional works comprised the largest single classification.”<sup>19</sup> This point is further solidified when reflecting on Lutz’s study. In his article, “The Relative Influence of European Writers on the Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought,” Lutz expressed his desire to sort out “the relative influence of European thinkers.” He was not concerned with how to count biblical citations. Yet he went on to say that “...it is relevant, nonetheless, to note the prominence of biblical sources for American political thought, since it was highly influential in our political tradition, and is not always given the attention it deserves.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Donald Lutz, “The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought,” *The American Political Science Review*, 192.

<sup>19</sup> Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Donald Lutz, “The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought,” *The American Political Science Review*, 192.

Research from those such as Bonomi and Lutz also supports that of Daniel Dreisbach. In *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*, Dreisbach argues that American founders not only read their Bible but that they also knew it well. In fact, based on quotations from “...both familiar and obscure scriptural passages” he says that the founders knew their Bible from “cover to cover.”<sup>21</sup> Dreisbach, like Bonomi and some others, looks to the culture of the eighteenth-century and says that the “...political discourse of the age—both private and public—was replete with quotations from, allusions to, and the rhythms” of the Bible.<sup>22</sup> Dreisbach and Fania Oz-Salzberger are both scholars who have written about the extensive use of Biblical references in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century that are not given footnotes. This implies that the intended audience was acquainted with the cited material.<sup>23</sup> Oz-Salzberger describes this as evidence that the Bible was like, “...the clean air we breathe: so self-evident that one needn’t bother to give it credit.”<sup>24</sup> With cultural observations such as these, it seem clear that those in the eighteenth-century were more well-versed in their Biblical familiarity than the culture of today.

Historiography of the Revolution typically does not place much focus on quotations of the Bible and sermons. Instead, the conversation is dominated by events such as the Stamp Act and the Boston Massacre. Focusing on these major events has been in vogue since just after the Revolution. David Ramsay lived in Charleston during the founding era and was among the first to write about the American Revolution. In his writing, he spent some time describing the

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel Dreisbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Donald Lutz, “The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought,” *The American Political Science Review*, 191.

<sup>24</sup> Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism,” *Hebraic Political Studies*, 570.

leadup to conflict and the efforts taken to provide unity of mind for the American public.

Ramsay described how the events in New England that were underway were known to be critical and that patriot leaders knew that if the "...other colonies did not support the people of Boston, they must be crushed, and it was equally obvious, that in their coercion a precedent, injurious to liberty, would be established."<sup>25</sup> Ramsay demonstrated that beliefs or ideas of the Patriots influenced their actions. The expression of these ideas through the use of rhetoric would be part of the method utilized to galvanize the populace.

Rhetoric was an important aspect in the Revolution. An example of how rhetoric was utilized to attempt to unify patriots came early on. Ramsay states that around 1774, "The words Whigs and Tories...were now introduced as the distinguishing names of parties." Ramsay explained that "Whigs" were used to describe individuals who "were for making a common cause with Boston and supporting the colonies in their opposition to the claims of parliament." Thus, a "Torie" was to reference a person who favored Great Britain and wished "...either that no measures, or only palliative measures, should be adopted in opposition to her schemes."<sup>26</sup>

Ramsay dialogued about the period of time when tension was continuing to build, and the idea of independence was beginning to be more commonly debated. "While the public mind was balancing on this eventful subject," several authors rose in defense of seeking independence. Of these authors and works produced, Ramsay remembers that "Thomas Paine... under the signature of Common Sense, held the most distinguished rank."<sup>27</sup> As Ramsay indicated, public appeal through discourse was a vital element leading up to the Revolution,

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<sup>25</sup> David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, 105.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 106.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 315.

and Paine had made a great impact. Paine would remain a significant figure and *Common Sense* still remains important to understanding the period. Paine argued that the cause in which America was wrapped was “...the cause of all mankind” and that the circumstances were not local, “...but universal, and through which the principles of all lovers of mankind are affected.”<sup>28</sup> His comment and interpretation of scripture would be argued by contemporaries such as John Adams and continue to be debated as to their influence by scholars today.<sup>29</sup>

According to Ramsay, the American Revolution “...was not forced on the people by ambitious leaders grasping at supreme power, but every measure of it was forced on Congress, by the necessity of the case, and the voice of the people.” “The change of the public mind” was a monumental task that was not forced and as such was also “...without a parallel.” This an important observation that Ramsay has made and now sparks much debate. How did this occur exactly? What was the ultimate source that would lead so many to switch from loyal servants to revolutionaries? Ramsay remembered that in a span of around two years, around three million British colonists in America “...passed over from the love and duty of loyal subjects, to the hatred and resentment of enemies.”<sup>30</sup>

Ramsay described how the terms Whigs and Tories came to common usage in the years leading up to the Revolution. John Selby implies that those terms were used to define the attitude and understanding of the Revolution for an extended time. He comments that, “Most nineteenth-century writers accepted the Whigs’ designation of their native opponents as

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, Introduction.

<sup>29</sup> Eric Nelson, “Hebraism and the Republican Turn of 1776: A Contemporary Account of the Debate Over *Common Sense*,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 784; L.H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams* (Cambridge, Mass, 1961) 3, 333.

<sup>30</sup> David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, 317.

Tories” until the around the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> Major historical events and ideas of the Revolution were put in ink by Ramsay, a contemporary who would have possessed the same worldview as those who led the Revolution. As such, there must be items that he left unexpressed since they would have been assumed. Instead, Ramsay would have focused on the events he and others understood to be vital to his account of the Revolution. These events were primarily political and dealt with action. Unsurprisingly, the rough outline of what Ramsay communicated was the outline followed for over a century in reflecting on the Revolution.

Historians began to depart from these popular depictions of these historical events and toward analysis about 140 years after the Revolution. During this period, which happened in the early twentieth-century, the complexity of the topic began to emerge. John E. Selby wrote that, “An old cliché in historiography is that each generation writes its own history. Certainly the history of the American Revolution conforms to this pattern.”<sup>32</sup> Despite the gap in time between the Revolution and the early scholarship of the twentieth-century, most of the early work that was produced continued to focus primarily on the major political events with little if any focus given to cultural nuances that had changed with the passage of time.

Until the early twentieth-century, the predominant understanding of the American founding was that the “Framers of the Constitution were disinterested statesmen and that the Constitution embodies the sovereign will of the American people and represented the interests of all Americans.”<sup>33</sup> It was at this point that an economic interpretation of the Constitution came to light. Conversation around the proper interpretation of the American Revolution took

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<sup>31</sup> John E. Selby, “Revolutionary America: The Historiography,” *OAH Magazine of History*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Alan Gibson, *Understanding the Founding: The Critical Questions*, 4.

its first significant turn when Charles Beard published *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* in 1913. Alan Gibson, said that while many of Beard's arguments were anticipated previously, "...it is no exaggeration to suggest that Beard's book is the most important work ever written on the American Founding, primarily because it liberated scholars to critically study the Founders rather than merely celebrate them."<sup>34</sup> Beard's willingness to evaluate the Founders in a different context is a critical shift in methodology. Framers of the Constitution and those who led America in the Revolution in general were now being viewed as more suspicious. An economic interpretation argued that "behind patriotic posturing of politicians often lurked ulterior motives and domestic struggle: producers against consumers, debtors against creditors, farmers against middlemen, management against labor."<sup>35</sup>

Many scholars during the 1930s and 1940s had little impact in dislodging Beard's proposed economic interpretation from becoming the prevailing understanding of the founding period.<sup>36</sup> All this was in spite of the fact that Beard's methodology left much to be desired. Gibson argues that "*An Economic Interpretation* is shot full of ambiguities, contradictions, and perhaps even deliberately duplicitous statements that are sure to cause consternation."<sup>37</sup> Despite the weaknesses in methodology and argumentation, the progressive interpretation was the prevailing view until another group of scholars emerged from the fray.

Beard's thesis was under tough scrutiny and the economic interpretation was about to be transitioned out of popular acceptance in the academic world. Post-World War II scholars

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>35</sup> John E. Selby, "Revolutionary American: The Historiography," *OAH Magazine of History*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Alan Gibson, *Understanding the Founding: The Critical Questions*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

who broke the progressive hold of interpretation included Robert E. Brown, Forrest McDonald, Lee Benson, Philip A. Crowl, William C. Pool, and Robert Thomas.<sup>38</sup> In the preface of *Novus Ordo Seclorum*, Forrest McDonald stated that in 1958 he published *We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution*, “...which was primarily concerned with testing Charles A. Beard’s *Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*—then the prevailing version” and that the results of his test were in the “negative.”<sup>39</sup> McDonald indicated that while he and others had effectively made Beard’s thesis “defunct,” he had not yet given up on an economic interpretation of the founding. In 1965, McDonald published *E Pluribus Unum*, which “...focused upon the wheeling and dealing and the interplay between politics and economics which enabled hard-nosed practical men to establish the Constitution; several reviewers described it as “neo-Beardian.””<sup>40</sup> Despite his critical review of Beard, McDonald’s earlier scholarship can still be viewed as an economic interpretation. “Perhaps no scholar of the American Founding as done more than McDonald to establish that the Framers were often ‘driven by base motives, especially greed,’ and, conversely, to support the contention that that ‘establishment of the Constitution was far from a philosophical matter.’”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Alan Gibson, *Understanding the Founding: The Critical Questions*, 24., see Brown, *Charles Beard and the Constitution*; McDonald, *We the People*; Forrest McDonald, “The Anti-Federalists,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 46 (Spring 1963): 206-214; Lee Benson, *Turner and Beard: American Historical Writing Reconsidered* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1960); Philip A. Crowl, “Anti-Federalism in Maryland, 1787-1788,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 4 (October 1947): 446-469; William C. Pool, “An Economic Interpretation of the Ratification of the Federal Constitution in North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 27 (April, July, October 1950): 119-141, 289-313, 437-461; Robert Thomas, “The Virginia Convention of 1788: A Criticism of Charles Beard’s *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*,” *Journal of Southern History* 19 (February 1953): 63-72.

<sup>39</sup> Forrest McDonald, *Novus Ordo Seclorum*, vii.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Alan Gibson, *Understanding the Founding: The Critical Questions*, 34; Forrest McDonald, *We the People*, 358; McDonald, *E Pluribus Unum*, 15, 40, 129, 310.

Despite some statements that support assertions for an economic interpretation, McDonald eventually concluded that an “economic interpretation of the Constitution does not work.”<sup>42</sup> As more sources were uncovered and analyzed, it was clear that a theory of two economic interests striving against each other could not be supported. While McDonald and others in the post-World War II period had successfully dethroned Beard’s thesis, a new way of interpreting the founding was emerging. The progressive and economic methods of interpretation looked to practical influences that led to peoples’ actions. An example would be a person who chose to advocate for legislation that led to a personal profit. This was a day to day motive. Economic analysis “...was no longer in season: students of the Revolution and of the early national period, led by Bernard Bailyn and J. G. A. Pocock, turned their attention to the role of ideology in the founding of the nation.”<sup>43</sup>

John Selby believes that Bernard Bailyn’s *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* is “...arguably the most important work in [the twentieth] century on the coming of the war.”<sup>44</sup> Robert E. Shalhope states that Bailyn was the “...progenitor of this new appreciation” for the role of ideology in the historical interpretation of the founding. The specific ideology that Bailyn and others would call upon was republicanism. Republicanism was advanced by Bernard Bailyn with his books *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, and *The Origins of American Politics*, both published in 1967. In his opening to *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Bailyn told the story of how his book had developed from a project of republishing pamphlets that were important during the revolutionary period. It was

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*; Forrest McDonald, *We the People*, vii.

<sup>43</sup> Forrest McDonald, *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution*, vii.

<sup>44</sup> John E. Selby, “Revolutionary American: The Historiography,” *OAH Magazine of History*, 6.

reading and studying these works that confirmed Bailyn's "...old-fashioned view that the American Revolution was above all else an ideological, constitutional, political struggle and not primarily a controversy between social groups."<sup>45</sup>

Adding to Bailyn's work, Gordon S. Wood published *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787* in 1969, and J. G. A. Pocock published *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* in 1975 along with "The Machiavellian Moment Revisited: A Study in History and Ideology" in 1981. According to Shalhope, these scholars argue that colonial American spokesmen drew "...deeply on the libertarian thought of the English commonwealthmen, embraced a distinctive set of political and social attitudes and that these attitudes permeated their society. Believing that history revealed a continual struggle between the spheres of liberty and power, the American revolutionaries quickly formed a consensus in which the concept of republicanism epitomized the new social and political world they believed they had created."<sup>46</sup> As a result of the scholarship of men like Bailyn, Wood, and Pocock, an ideological interpretation gripped the field of history. A significant feature of this early scholarship was its conviction of the unity of ideology that the founders possessed.

A consensus view of republican thought was a breath of fresh air to many. It recognized that founders did in fact act upon ideas, not temporal factors alone. As is the case with most interpretations, this view also had its shortcomings. While the economic interpretation of the founding focused heavily on the environment of day to day circumstances, this early consensus

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<sup>45</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, vi.

<sup>46</sup> Robert E. Shalhope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 334.

view of republicanism did not seem to give enough credence to that very concept. Common criticism of this interpretation is that some founders possessed ideologies outside of what would be termed classical republicanism, thus the consensus downplayed dissenting viewpoints. Shalhope stated that Bailyn's "analysis [was] one-dimensional." As a result of these weaknesses, Shalhope declared that there existed a "...major weakness of most early studies of republicanism—the failure to deal with the dynamic interrelationships between ideological perceptions and the environment in which they occur."<sup>47</sup> Essentially historians began to agree that ideology is an important aspect to understanding the foundations in the American founding but that the situation was more complex than those like Bailyn conveyed. The early historians who advocated for an ideological angle oversimplified what was actually going on by attempting to establish a consensus view.

Not long after this occurred, a debate was launched about what ideological view was most dominant among the founders and how historians should understand the role of political thought in the eighteenth century. The debate over ideology centered over liberalism versus republicanism and played out over the 1980s and 1990s. A positive aspect of the debate was that those on each side of the aisle seemed to agree that political ideas were important. Deciding what political ideas had the largest pull was another story altogether. This discussion over classical republicanism or Lockean liberalism produced much scholarship and many opinions. So much so, it is easy to get lost in the weeds. Scholars during this period include Robert Shalhope, Robert Keley, Eric Foner, Dirk Hoerder, and Gary B. Nash to name a few.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Robert E. Shalhope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 338.

During the 1990s, the republicanism or liberalism debate began to fade. Alan Gibson described it as “...sterile, unproductive and even nauseating.”<sup>49</sup> While scholars seem to be mostly finished with the liberalism-republicanism debate, they are not yet finished exploring the concept of how ideas were instrumental during the founding period. It seems the scholarship of the debate through the 1980s and 1990s produced enough good material that historians evaluated each camp and realized each had merit. “What James Kloppenberg wrote in 1987 is even more true in 2000: “...partisans of both the republican and the liberal interpretations have identified strands of American political culture whose presence can no longer be convincingly denied.” Scholars who dismiss the influence of either republicanism or liberalism, Kloppenberg continued, “ignore an increasingly impressive body of scholarship not merely suggesting, but showing, evidence of contrast and diversity.”<sup>50</sup> What emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century was an interpretation that “...the political thought of the Founders is best understood as an amalgam of liberalism, republicanism, and perhaps other traditions of political thought.”<sup>51</sup> The strength of this interpretation is its willingness to

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<sup>49</sup> Alan Gibson, “Ancients, Moderns and Americans: The Republicanism—Liberalism Debate Revisited,” *History of Political Thought*, 262.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 263; James T. Kloppenberg, “The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse,” *Journal of American History*, 74 (1987) 11.

<sup>51</sup> Alan Gibson, “Ancients, Moderns and Americans: The Republicanism—Liberalism Debate Revisited,” *History of Political Thought*, 261; Gibson provides a footnote of scholars who subscribe to this point; Saul Cornell, “Liberal Republicans or Republican Liberals?: The Political Thought of the Founders Reconsidered,” *Reviews in American History*, 21 (1993) 29-30; Steven Dwoletz, *The Unvarnished Doctrine: Locke, Liberalism, and the American Revolution* (Durham, NC, 1990) 37-8, 191; Morton Horwitz, “Republicanism and Liberalism in American Constitutional Thought,” *William and Mary Law Review*, 29 (1987) 57-74; Isaac Kramnick, “The Great National Discussion: The Discourse of Politics in 1787,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 45 (1988) 3-32; Forrest McDonald, *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution* (Lawrence, KS, 1988) 9; J.G.A. Pocock, “Communications,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 45 (1988) 817; Cass Sunstein, “Beyond the Republican Revival,” *The Yale Law Journal*, 97 (1988) 1539-90; Mark Tushnet, *Red, White, and Blue: A Critical Analysis of Constitutional Law* (Cambridge, 1988) 4-5; Gordon S. Wood, “Afterword,” in *The Republican Synthesis Revisited*, ed. Klein *et al*, 143-51; Peter S. Onuf, “Reflections on the Founding: Constitutional Historiography in Bicentennial Perspective,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 46 (1989) 341-75.

embrace the spectrum of research that had come to the forefront over the previous century. Gibson argues that the either-or formulation does not recognize the Founders as "...creative agents who not only adopted but also reformulated political ideas."<sup>52</sup> He goes on to say that embracing more of a both-and position serves to see the founders as creative agents in history and attempts to "...understand the Founders' political thought on its own terms."<sup>53</sup> While this is a strong position, it can still be improved upon, specifically in terms of evaluating the nuances of the Founders' source material.

Over the past decade or there about, a number of articles and books have been published that are shifting the interpretive understanding of the American founding. Scholars are taking another look at the myriad of source material that is said to play a part in influencing the political views of the Founders. During the debates over liberalism or republicanism, many sources of material surfaced as being important, from figures such as Whig political thinkers from England during the seventeenth century to John Locke and Thomas Paine. During the early twenty-first-century, there has been an investigation into the study of the Old Testament of the Bible and its role as a political document. This study "...evolved as an offshoot of humanism in the wake of the Protestant Reformation" and has come to be known as political Hebraism.<sup>54</sup> Hebraic scholars have begun to shift study of the American founding in light of their scholarship. While the investigation of Hebraism is not solely focused on the American

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<sup>52</sup> Alan Gibson, *Understanding the Founding: The Critical Questions*, 135.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

<sup>54</sup> Eran Shalev, "A Perfect Republic: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788," *The New England Quarterly*, 235.

founding, its research has provided depth to the field by illuminating information on the same figures and ideas that have been a staple in the study of early American history.

In 1997, Miriam Bodian published “Biblical Hebrews and the Rhetoric of Republicanism: Seventeenth-Century Portuguese Jews on the Jewish Community.” Bodian is an early comer to the evaluation of Jewish political influence in the world of republicanism. Yet earlier still was the work of Danial Elazar with his article “Deuteronomy as Israel’s Ancient Constitution: Some Preliminary Reflections” published in 1992. Bodian and Elazar contributed to how political thinkers in the seventeenth century had taken thoughts from a republican understanding of the Deuteronomy and even 1 Samuel. More scholarship was to follow in the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century and more is likely to come.

Eran Shalev wrote, “A Perfect Republic: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788” in 2009 and published a book titled *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War* in 2013. Eric Nelson argued that Thomas Paine’s writing also shows Hebraic influence in “Hebraism and the Republican Turn of 1776: A Contemporary Account of the Debate Over Common Sense” in 2013. Yechiel Leiter, only a few years prior, published “The Hebraic Roots of John Locke’s Doctrine of Charity” in 2008. These works and others have added to the complexity of how historians understand political theorists from the sixteenth century forward.

To this point, there has been a great unfolding of ideas dealing with how historians have understood the founding of the United States. While the economic interpretation of the founding has mostly been left behind, it should be mentioned that it has continued to linger even while the predominant focus of study moved into ideology. Not only that, but the

economic interpretation lives on within the progressive interpretation. “Progressives were initially concerned with establishing that the Constitution was not responsive to popular majorities and that property qualifications within the states disenfranchised a ‘mass of men.’”<sup>55</sup> While the economic mode of interpretation was largely left behind, the progressives produced various other ways of interpreting the founding. Examples of further progressive interpretations show in attempts to disprove the democratic nature of the constitution by investigating the study of women and African Americans along with equal representation of the states in the Senate and the three-fifths clause as proofs posed by the progressives.<sup>56</sup> Many of these interpretations of the founding period grew during the 1960s and 1970s and continue to enter the debate.

Today, scholars stand on the shoulders of previous historians and their research. Information and primary source materials have become more readily available. As that has occurred, it has allowed for study that was not possible when access to information was more limited. In this light, Hebraic scholarship has begun to provide tremendous depth for historical analysis of the founding era of the United States. For decades, scholars have debated over the predominant ideologies that influenced the Founders. What has come to light, however, are the same names and works. Largely, these have been Whig theorists of the seventeenth-century, Enlightenment philosophers, and pamphlet writers such as Thomas Paine. What Hebraic scholars have begun to accomplish is to show that all of these influential ideas and people, from the Whigs, to the enlightenment philosophers, and pamphlet writers seem to

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<sup>55</sup> Alan Gibson, *Understanding the Founding: The Critical Questions*, 7.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

possess a common thread. This common thread is that all possess a certain affinity for a Jewish civic structure as expressed in the Old Testament.

Political Hebraic scholarship has the ability to enrich early American historical interpretation a great deal. Eran Shalev works to highlight the role of the Old Testament “...in the formation and evolution” of the American political worldview.<sup>57</sup> While political Hebraism provides the common thread that has the possibility of uniting previous research, it lacks an explanation of why it was instrumental. Why is it that proper interpretation of Deuteronomy or the story of the Exodus was prized by the Founders? Why is it valuable that a Jewish common thread ties so many significant people and ideas to the Founders? And how does this information highlight previous republican research?

Bruce Kuklick produced a chapter in *Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, and the Representation of American Culture* that he titled, “The Two Cultures in Eighteenth-Century America.” The book is a collection of chapters that explore Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Edwards as representations of two opposing cultures in America; or better yet, it is a book exploring the concept that these two men do not represent two opposing cultures at all. Kuklick says that his history students today see the “...presumption of disparity between two cultural strands in America—Puritanism and the Enlightenment, Christianity and Republicanism.”<sup>58</sup> The idea being expressed is that Franklin and Edwards epitomize each of these two realms of politics and religion. Yet, this begs the question that Kuklick then asks: “If

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<sup>57</sup> Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament As a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War*, 19.

<sup>58</sup> Bruce Kuklick, “The Two Cultures in Eighteenth-Century America,” *Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, and the Representation of American Culture*, 102.

there were critical differences in colonial culture embodied by the two men, why was the American Revolution such a relatively tame affair?"<sup>59</sup> The very idea articulated in this question reveals what is lacking in the analysis of the Revolution.

Ramsay set the stage for understanding the Revolution with his early publication. Yet the critical point to consider is that Ramsay was communicating the events as one immersed in the revolutionary culture. As such, he did not need to communicate some issues since they would be understood by that generation. As American culture moved on, a great division between a political realm and religious realm occurred. Viewing reality through these separate realms has directed historiography over the past century. An analysis is needed that is capable of moving beyond the investigation of ideas and influential people and toward answering why those ideas and why those people were influential.

Political Hebraism provides a common link between the people and ideas upon which the Founders relied. Further analysis should attempt to expand on the cultural research of scholars such as Bonomi and Dreisbach in order to explain that a Christian worldview existed at the time that gave rise to political ideas foundational to those in the eighteenth-century. For when Samuel Langdon, who served as a president of Harvard, offered a sermon in 1775, he understood the Jewish constitution was, "...if considered merely in a civil view...a perfect Republic." He also expressed that same Jewish government, "...according to the original constitution, ...was divinely established."<sup>60</sup> Langdon's comments exemplify the reality that the

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Samuel Langdon, *Government Corrupted by Vice, and Recovered by Righteousness*, 11.

founding generation understood the Jewish civic structure as a foundational model and furthermore assigned higher value to it as a result of their Christian worldview.

The following chapter will show that a pervasive biblical worldview existed from initial colonial settlements through the revolution in America. Furthermore, it is due to the engrained biblical rhetoric and knowledge that people turned to understand all areas of their lives through what the Bible might say. While it is becoming well documented that the Old Testament was utilized as a political document, understanding the ethos of the eighteenth-century provides insight into why political Hebraism was important. Chapter two will explore the Bible's role in early settlement, colonial law, education, and publication leading up to the revolution. Research collected in chapter two will not provide new insight in and of itself, yet it is crucial to understand its contents and let it serve as a foundation to better understand further chapters in their proper context.

As noted earlier, a bifurcation exists in modern politics and scholarship that hinders a proper understanding of how the realms of religion and politics should be understood. As such, chapter three will build from chapter two and explore several election day sermons throughout the eighteenth-century. Some historians have commented on these sermons, their ministers, or even compiled sermons together, but no evaluation exists that analyzes what passages of Old Testament texts were used in these sermons. Chapter three will look at what passages were used in political sermons, how those sermons were structured, and evaluate if those patterns changed as the revolution took place.

The final chapter will evaluate political Hebraism among popular statesman and authors. This will further demonstrate that using the Old Testament as a political document

was pervasive beyond religious leaders. Not only do these statesmen turn to political Hebraism, their rhetoric will mimic the clergy from chapter three. All of these chapters serve not to take away from previous research. Instead, this will build upon those such as Bonomi, Driesbach, and Shalev. These chapters will seek to harmonize the work of Hebraic scholars with that of earlier works and expand the analysis of clergy and statemen alike.

## Chapter Two – Understanding the Role of Education, Literacy, and A Pervasive Biblical Worldview in Political Hebraism

“...we ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained; and since the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government are justly considered, perhaps, as deeply, as finally, staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people.” -George Washington

Similar to many in his generation, George Washington viewed the republican model of government and its establishment as somewhat of a divine institution for Americans to obediently respect and preserve. Washington concluded that, “[God’s] divine blessing may be equally conspicuous on the enlarged views, the temperate consultations, and the wise measures on which the success of this Government must depend.”<sup>1</sup> Washington chose words and expressed ideas that his fellow Americans would know and understand. Many of these ideas were familiar to his audience due to their common education and cultural worldview. This was a worldview informed by an education that was shaped by the Bible. Exploring how the Bible informed education and how Judeo-Christian ideas shaped the worldview of those in the eighteenth-century will help set the context to answer why political Hebraism was prominent during the Revolution.

During the pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary period in America, the Bible and biblical literature shaped both culture and education. Laws for colonial education demonstrate the intent of settlers for the population to be able to read and understand both colonial law

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<sup>1</sup> George Washington, “First Inaugural Address, Thursday April 30, 1789,” in *Presidential Inaugural Addresses*, 3-4.

scripture. In Massachusetts, teachers were to instruct children so that the children could “read truly and distinctly, that they may be capable of reading the Holy Scriptures, and other pious and useful books.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, statistical information from what presses were printing, what authors and titles were popular, along with what role the Bible held in these areas, will all help establish the potential pervasiveness of political Hebraism in the eighteenth-century. Gleaning from this information will help readers today better understand why John Adams would reference that the Hebrew government, “...instituted by God, had a judge, the great Sanhedrin, and general assemblies of the people” in his *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*.<sup>3</sup>

In its most basic form, Kalman Neuman describes political Hebraism as “[referring] to texts that convey readings of the Hebrew Bible in a political context.”<sup>4</sup> As such, it may be helpful to better understand the familiarity of people in the eighteenth-century with Old Testament scripture. If it is plain that people knew their Bibles well, or Old Testaments in particular, that would demonstrate, at least in part, why political Hebraism would manifest itself in political discussion. If this occurs, it will be evidenced by people’s references from the Old Testament in order to inform or understand political ideas. In order to begin an investigation into familiarity with scripture, a look into the education leading up to the

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<sup>2</sup> “Instructions for Schoolmasters Employed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts,” (1706), in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History, Vol 1*, 327.

<sup>3</sup> John Adams, *A Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, 147.

<sup>4</sup> Kalman Neuman, “Political Hebraism and the Early Modern ‘Respublica Hebraeorum’: On Defining the Field.” *Hebraic Political Studies*, 59; see also, Newman’s note which states, “the contemporary use of the term ‘Hebrew Bible’ is an attempt to find a theologically neutral term for what the Christians is the Old Testament and for Jews is the Tanach. See Rolf Rendtorff, “Old Testament Theology, Tanach Theology, or biblical Theology? Reflections in an Ecumenical Context,” *Biblia* (73, (1992)) 441-451; see also Eran Shalev, “A Perfect Republic: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788,” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol 82, No 2 (June 2009), 235-263.

Revolution should be helpful. How did individuals during the period view education? Did they voice why education was important? Did they express a political end that they thought education should achieve? And, what sort of material did they use to teach children? These sorts of questions will shed light on how education through the eighteenth-century set the stage for evaluating politics through a biblical understanding.

Some historians have done work on the area of education as they have defined the emergence of the American Revolution in terms of republicanism versus classical republicanism and similar distinctions. Historians who deal with this topic include Bernard Bailyn, Perry Miller, J.G.A. Pocock, Robert Shalhope, and Gordon Wood.<sup>5</sup> Many of these authors focus on the classic literature used during the revolution that are either directly Greek or Roman, or they focus on authors that come after the English civil war and are enlightened in their thought – meaning the ideas and history of antiquity deeply saturated their writing. Many of these historians even seek to discover which enlightenment philosopher may have had the greatest impact on Revolutionary Americans. Yet, most fail to evaluate ideas that impacted both the Revolutionaries and the Enlightenment philosophers that are outside the humanistic scope. However, Hebraic scholars that have completed research outside of the American Revolution have produced studies that should greatly impact how modern scholars view the Revolution.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For discussion turn to Paul Rehe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, (Cambridge, Belknap Press, 1967); J.G.A. Pocock, "Machiavelli, Harrington, and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly*, (3<sup>rd</sup> Ser, 1965, 22, 549-583) and *The Machiavellian Moment*, (Princeton University Press, 1975); Robert Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly*, (3<sup>rd</sup> ser, 1972, 29, 49-80) and "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly*, (3<sup>rd</sup> Ser, 1982, 39, 334-356); Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969)

<sup>6</sup> For political Hebraism studies beyond the American Revolution see Fania Oz-Salzberger, "The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism," *Hebraic Political Studies*, (Vol 1, No 5 (Fall 2006)

Early American scholarship lacked an investigation into how enlightened authors have been influenced by the political structure of the Jews and how the Bible or Old Testament fits into the Revolutionaries thought. Many scholars bifurcated these areas of inquiry and have not evaluated how political and religious ideas interact with one another. These should be important and complimentary areas of study. While most scholarship evaluates American Revolution ideological origins from the Greco-Roman world or from philosophy from the English civil war, this needs to expand to how Founders viewed the Jewish political structure. In order to accomplish that task, historians should observe how the culture used religious ideas in education and literature.

To gain insight into the foundation of education and ideas in America one can turn to its first colonies. Early settlements had a difficult beginning and some people, such as John Winthrop, expressed a critical view of initial plantations like Jamestown for their “rude and undisciplined” inhabitants.<sup>7</sup> Yet despite the early difficulties, those taking part in the establishment of Jamestown took care to express their intentions in their Charter of 1606 to propagate the “Christian religion” and teach people who “yet live in darkens and miserable

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586-592); Kalman Neuman, “Political Hebraism and the Early Modern ‘Respublica Hebraeorum’: On Defining the Field,” *Hebraic Political Studies*, (Vol 1, (Fall 2005): 57-70); Eric Nelson, “‘Talmudical Commonwealths’ and the Rise of Republican Exclusivism,” *The Historical Journal*, (Vol 50, No 4 (December 2007) 809-835); Yechiel Leiter, “The Hebraic Roots of John Locke’s Doctrine of Charity,” *Jewish Political Studies Review*, ( Jerusalem Vol 20, Iss ¼ (Fall 2008) 141-159); Willi Goetschel, “Tangled Genealogies: Hellenism, Hebraism, and the Discourse of Modernity,” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, (Vol 21, No 3 (Winter 2014) 181-194); Miriam Bodian, “Biblical Hebrews and the Rhetoric of Republicanism: Seventeenth-Century Portuguese Jews on the Jewish Community,” *AJS Review*, (Vol 22, No 2 (1997) 199-221); and Ronald Beiner, “James Harrington on the Hebrew Commonwealth,” *The Review of Politics*, (Vol 76, No 2 (Spring 2014) 169-193).

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience 1607-1783*, 14; See John Winthrop, “Arguments for the Plantation of New England,” (1629), *Winthrop Papers*, (5+ Vols; Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1929- ), II, 106-149, especially 143. See also the similar observation of John White in *The Planters Plea* (London: William Jones, 1630) in Force, ed, *Tracts*, vol II, no 3, 19-22; Alan Taylor calls early Virginia settlers an “unstable and fractious of gentlemen-adventurers in command and poor vagrants rounded up from the streets of London and forcibly sent to Virginia,” in *American Colonies: The Settling of North America*, 131.

ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in 1620, for the “Glory of God, and advancement of the Christian Faith,” John Carver and others established a colony farther north at Plymouth.<sup>9</sup> Both Jamestown and Plymouth had an expressed intention of establishing and furthering Christianity in the new world.

Education in the colony of Virginia was a valued ideal in shaping the early society. While those in Virginia may not have been as successful as early colonists in New England in executing their vision of education, it does not necessarily indicate a lesser desire for education in the area. In 1618 the Governor-elect of Virginia, George Yeardley, received a message of a “special Grant and license from his Majesty...for the building and planting of a college for the training up of children...in true religion, moral virtue, and civility.”<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, George Yeardley would be unable to move forward with building the proposed college in Virginia. Similarly, there were many plans to promote education in Virginia, spearheaded by Reverend Patrick Copland, that were not carried out despite strong efforts. Lawrence Cremin states that the “failure of these endeavors is far less significant” than what they would show in England’s evolution of colonial building.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the expressed intentions of early settlers demonstrate, even if unsuccessful in the onset, important indicators of how people were progressing. This means that the mere expression of the importance of developing education early on in a settlement was indicative of a larger cultural shift taking

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<sup>8</sup> “The Charter of Virginia 1606,” in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History, Vol 1*, ed Sol Cohen, 334.

<sup>9</sup> “The Mayflower Compact,” (1620) in *The US Constitution and Other Key American Writings*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> “Instructions to Governor-Elect George Yeardley to Build a College at Henrico, Virginia,” *Education in the United States: A Documentary History, Vol 1*, ed Sol Cohen, 335.

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience 1607-1783*, 13.

place. A shift that showed English settlers were placing a high value on education and wanted to take steps to ensure education would be part of their colonies.

John Winthrop arrived at Salem, Massachusetts on June 12, 1630. Before Winthrop endeavored to cross the Atlantic, he took notes and studied earlier English plantations. According to Winthrop, previous plantations had failed or at least been hindered by three errors that he would strive to avoid. Winthrop concluded that the missteps of English colonies had been that they "...employed a multitude of rude and undisciplined persons; they had failed to establish proper forms of government; and they had directed their efforts toward carnal rather than religious ends."<sup>12</sup> Winthrop strived to correct those errors, and, in so doing, he effectively helped to transform the theory of colonization.<sup>13</sup> This transformation was similar to that of the Pilgrims from Plymouth but improved upon their foundation.

Winthrop desired that the Puritans, like the Pilgrims, would settle as a community, "knit together by ties of family, friendship, and common loyalty." Much like the Pilgrims, the Puritans attempted to maintain and grow their "religious and cultural integrity" as they established their colony in the New World.<sup>14</sup> The passion of Winthrop's vision is seen in his address to his fellow Puritans when he told them, "We must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us."<sup>15</sup> Winthrop's sermon was not only compelling, but it demonstrates familiarity with Hebrew scripture and was based upon a text from Deuteronomy.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 14; Cremin referenced John Winthrop, "Arguments for the Plantations of New England," (1629), *Winthrop Papers* (5 Vols; Boston; The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1929, II.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, Vol 1, ed Sol Cohen, 366.

Winthrop, along with many Puritans, was dissatisfied with his cultural surroundings in England. He wrote that, “The fountains of learning and religion are so corrupted, as (besides the unsupportable charge of their education) most children, even the best wits and of fairest hopes, are perverted, corrupted and utterly overthrown by the multitude of evil examples and the licentious government of those seminaries.” In the New World, under careful supervision, education would be reformed, and the church and commonwealth purified.<sup>16</sup> Education was a valued aspect of life during this period, something that is evident considering Massachusetts Bay Colony’s initial settlement “...included an extraordinarily high percentage of university-trained men.”<sup>17</sup>

Massachusetts was clear in their pursuit of developing not only education, but also their laws. In fact, law and education went hand in hand and were connected to the settler’s biblical ideals. In the *Book of the General Laws and Liberties* of Massachusetts, the opening paragraph states that “...as God had set up political government among his people of Israel he gave them a body of laws for judgement both in civil and criminal cases.” As the Law book opened it not only connected the concept of law to God as a law-giver, but they also stated the importance of that law by saying a “Common-wealth without laws is like a ship without rigging and steerage.”<sup>18</sup> Education and law were tied to biblical concepts for those in New England.

It was twelve years after Winthrop first set foot in Massachusetts that the Massachusetts School Law of 1642 was passed. The School Law of 1642 empowered in every

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<sup>16</sup> Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education*, 16, see also John Winthrop, “Arguments for the Plantation of New England,” 115.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> *The Book of the General Lawes and Libertyes*, 3.

town, "...the chosen men appointed for managing the prudential affairs...be charged with the care of the redress of this evil" of the neglect of some parents in "training their children in learning." People in the area were empowering the government to ensure the education of the children, "...especially of their ability to read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of this country."<sup>19</sup> Five years later, the colony passed another telling law that dealt with the value of education. The Massachusetts School Law of 1647 was passed in order to protect the people from "that old deluder, Satan," who sought to "keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures." This law "ordered that every township in this jurisdiction, after the Lord hath increased them to the number of 50 householders, shall then forthwith appoint one within their town to teach all such children" to read and to write. Once a town were to "increase to the number of 100 families or householders, they shall set up a grammar school" with a master who could prepare students for the university.<sup>20</sup>

When evaluating the development of the Massachusetts Colony, it becomes clear that those involved valued education. Not only were religion and scripture valued individually, but they were also seen as invaluable for the good of the community. Knowing that the early colonists valued education for the purpose of reading scripture and understanding law begins to establish a basis to see that the Old Testament was influential in political discussion. Since education was important it would help to grasp what sort of material was used in the education process. Such an inquiry will no doubt illuminate how political Hebraism established itself in the eighteenth-century.

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<sup>19</sup> "Massachusetts School Law of 1642," in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History, Vol 1*, ed Sol Cohen, 393.

<sup>20</sup> "Massachusetts School Law of 1647," in *Education in the United States*, 394.

In *A History of the Book in America: Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, David Hall and Russell Martin produced an appendix on “Popular and Durable Authors and Titles” in the American colonies from 1640-1790. In their appendix, they ask the question, “Do schoolbooks properly figure in the history of authorship?”<sup>21</sup> *The New England Primer*, which reflects the question of Hall and Martin as a book with no author, was the single most reprinted title in their 150-year study.<sup>22</sup> As such, many people over a wide geographic area and timeframe would be aware of and possibly would have utilized the *Primer*. It is fair to assume that a book used in education that continued to be reprinted more often than any other title of the time was familiar to a large portion of society. While it may not be assumed that every person had access to the *Primer*, due to its large distribution its contents are valuable in understanding what was taught.

The *New England Primer* was printed and produced in Boston during the Revolution by Edward Draper. Not only was the *Primer* an important document in and of itself that demonstrates content used for education, its value is further increased considering editions were being produced in Boston during the war. The educational ideas within the *Primer* support the idea that the Bible was a known and valued in the eighteenth-century. Realizing that Biblical content was part of the foundation of education will aid in understanding that those biblical concepts would eventually show themselves in political discussion during the Revolution. Thus, understanding basic education will show a context in the culture that will

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<sup>21</sup> David Hall and Russell Martin, “A Note on Popular and Durable Authors and Titles,” in *A History of the Book in America: Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 519.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

support a better understanding of why political Hebraism was valuable at the point of the American Revolution.

As the *Primer* moves beyond teaching the alphabet, it transitions to a sequence of rhymes that progress alphabetically and has a direct reference to a biblical story or theological truth. This is demonstrated by stating the letter 'A' and following that with "In Adam's Fall We sinned all; B, Heaven to find the Bible Mind."<sup>23</sup> The *Primer* also includes stories from church history such as one from John Rogers from London who "...was the first martyr in Queen Mary's reign, and was burnt at Smithfield, February 14, 1554. His wife with nine small children...following him to the stake; with which sorrowful sight he was not in the least daunted, but with wonderful patience died courageously for the gospel of Jesus Christ."<sup>24</sup> Works such as the *New England Primer* demonstrate that learning reading and writing went alongside the teaching of Christianity during the colonial period in America.

Another book that was made to introduce children to reading in the colonies during the eighteenth-century was *The English Instructor or, the Art of Spelling Improved*. Isaiah Thomas helped print 20,000 copies with his master Zechariah Fowle around the late 1750s and said the book was "...in great repute, an in general use for many years."<sup>25</sup> *The English Instructor* used a similar method of teaching using Christian messages. Lesson one is "words of one syllable." Examples of these short sentences are, "Pray to God, Love God, Fear God, Serve God, and Do

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<sup>23</sup> John Cotton, *The New-England Primer Improved for the More Easy Attaining of the True Reading of English: To Which is Added the Assembly of Divines and Mr. Cotton's Catechism*, 15-18.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>25</sup> Ross Beales and Jennifer Monaghan, in the chapter "Practices of Reading," Beales and Monaghan title a section "Literacy and Schoolbooks," in *A History of the Book in America: Vol 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 384-385; here the authors detail several educational works, along with the time frame they were used and what regions of the colonies each book was most used; see also, Thomas quote located in Beales chapter, Isaiah Thomas, *Hist. Printing*, 133.

not swear, do not steal.”<sup>26</sup> Lesson two in *The Art of Spelling Improved* continues its religious education with “Thus Jesus would his children bless, and them with heavenly sweets caress.”<sup>27</sup> Books in circulation in the eighteenth-century taught children to read and write while simultaneously imparting direct truths from the Bible or rhymes and ideas with a biblical bent. The educational book *The Art of Spelling Improved* states explicitly that “To initiate children in the knowledge of the sacred writings, and to give an early taste of their beauty and excellency above all other writings, it may be proper, in the first place, to acquaint them with the most remarkable transactions contained therein.”<sup>28</sup>

Observing this trend in early American education is not arguing that America was comprised of people who were Christian and that there were no other worldviews within the colonies. It is imperative, however, to grasp how pervasive Christian ideology and biblical knowledge were among the population in order to understand why political Hebraism was pervasive during the American Revolution. The biblical basis for education in the eighteenth-century shows that people valued what the Bible taught. As such, people would also value what the Bible had to say about political structure.

An investigation into the authors and publications that were popular and remained popular can also contribute to understanding the Revolutionary mind. Yet, before jumping into popular literature, an estimate of the rate of literacy may prove helpful. After all, if the

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<sup>26</sup> Henry Dixon, *The English Instructor or, The Art of Spelling Improved. Being a More Plain, Easy, and Regular Method of Teaching Young Children, Than Any Extant*, (1736) 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> Henry Dixon, *The Art of Spelling Improved*, 111.

populace was predominately illiterate, then popular literary works are not reflective of the population at large but instead of the minority that could read.

Reflecting on his life, Benjamin Franklin recalled that, “From a child I was fond of reading, and all the little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books.”<sup>29</sup> While Franklin does not tell the reader at what age he learned to read, other than it was “early,” his story also falls short in providing details as to what reading was like for others. It can be insightful, however, that Franklin does say that his father’s “little library consisted chiefly of books in polemic divinity,” a detail that reflects the importance of religious material in the period, even if Franklin recalled the detail in some disappointment.<sup>30</sup> Yet the question remains, was the learning experience similar for Franklin as it would have been for most youth? Was Franklin more privileged to be able to learn to read, or was literacy fairly common?

Measuring the rate of literacy is difficult. Historians measure the literacy rate by using signatures on documents, an occurrence that was on the rise in the eighteenth-century.<sup>31</sup> Ross Beales and Jennifer Monaghan report that the rate of signature literacy in New England for white males was 70 percent in 1710 and rose to 90 percent by 1790. In a similar fashion, from the relatively large gap from that of men, the rate among white women rose from 45 percent to one that narrowed “the gap by the close of the colonial period.”<sup>32</sup> Another measure of literacy is found in those immigrating from Europe to the Colonies. From 1718-1759, 69 percent of

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<sup>29</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, 20.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Ross Beales and Jennifer Monaghan, “Practices of Reading,” in *A History of the Book in America*, 380.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*; see Kenneth A. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Inquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974) 13, 28; Gloria L. Main, “An Inquiry Into When and Why Women Learned to Write in Colonial New England,” *Journal of Social History*, 24 (1991): 580.

male indentured servants from London could sign their contracts and 71 percent of German immigrants could do the same from 1727-1775.<sup>33</sup>

While it may seem obvious that literacy among the black population was much lower than that of the white population, there remains an important trend to consider. A link between Christianity and the development of teaching reading has already been established. The same link exists and is important, not only in the white, but also within the black population. The Society of Friends, also known as Quakers, desired that black people be introduced to Christianity and come to Jesus Christ for their salvation. Similar to the original founding of New England and Virginia, people who wanted to teach the religion of Christianity saw that the best avenue to do that would be teaching others to read. The goal of the Quakers, along with other groups like the Society for Propagating the Gospel, was to put things like spelling books, books of prayer, catechisms, and Bibles into the hands of black people.<sup>34</sup> The outreach of preaching the gospel and teaching black people to read was not relegated to the northeast. Samuel Davies, a Presbyterian itinerant preacher who traveled to several congregations in Hanover County, Virginia “took time to preach specifically to slaves.”<sup>35</sup> The connection between reading and religion was established from the initial colonial settlements to the Great Awakening of the 1740’s to the period of the American Revolution. Connecting the importance of education and literacy to scripture is vital in understanding both the difference between the eighteenth-century and today, as well as why so many would see great value in turning to the Bible as a political guide.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 381.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 382.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 106.

The rising rate of literacy is a sign that not only was education valued but also that it was successfully implemented. These facts beg the question, outside of educational materials, what else were people reading? What books were in demand for print, what books were being reprinted, and what authors were in demand? It is difficult to answer each of these questions in a consistent manner. Attempting to assign some understandable value to records of the printing press is challenging for a few different reasons. One problem with the inquiry is a challenge to the accuracy of the overall picture due to how many books may have been lost with no information about them in our records. Another challenge is that items were printed but recorded or categorized differently. Some researchers have catalogued information by entries, while others have utilized a measure of pages.<sup>36</sup> Looking toward titles, entries, or pages has all been in attempt find the best common denominator in order to compare printed data as uniformly as possible. The basic reality is that a book is much different than a newspaper or a printed sermon.

While understanding how to break down print information is tricky, it is valuable in attempting to see what genres were important or useful to people. It does not necessarily mean that people agreed with content being printed, but it does stand to reason that a popular genre contained ideas people were familiar with and were evaluating. If religious and biblical ideas and literature were popular as a genre, it can be assumed that the populace was familiar with much of the content. This could indicate that the Bible and the ideas contained therein were important. Since the Bible was instrumental in education, further numbers from the press

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<sup>36</sup> Hugh Amory, "Appendix One: Note on Statistics," in *A History of the Book in America*, 515.

should show it was valuable as a genre and it would flow logically that the Bible was also important politically for those in the Revolution.

Hugh Amory built upon the research of others and compiled data derived from the North American Imprints Program, an on-line machine-readable database, or the NAIP. Amory's findings help shed some light on the challenging arithmetic dealing with understanding records from the printing press. As measured by sheets by genre from Boston printers in 1765, newspapers accounted for forty-three percent of printing, while almanacs was nearly sixteen percent, Psalm books was twelve percent, religious material ten percent, government printing another seven percent, and educational material six percent, and political, controversial and broadsides made up around seven percent.<sup>37</sup>

Amory's compilation provides a basis to see that newspapers and almanacs were becoming valuable and accounted for much of the printing in terms of sheets of paper. It is also clear that religious material was important since it made up ten percent of printed sheets. However, understanding the data still proves tricky, after all, Psalm books are their own category, yet they could be considered religious. Not only that, but educational books that were popular at the time and already addressed in this paper also prove to be religious in nature. As such, statistics bases on sheets printed show that religious material was important at the press but fall short of a conclusive measure of how important the particular ideas being printed were.

A telling reality from Amory's work is that, from 1701-1750, nearly every leading author was a prominent religious figure, a clergyman or religious educator. In fact, that trend

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 516.

continues for the majority of the century. However, as one may expect, as the American Revolution approached, other authors who deal with political ideas begin to emerge. While most authors only appear for one decade, there are a few who appear over many decades. Cotton Mather remained a leading author for the first thirty years of the century and Isaac Watts was a leader for well over forty years.<sup>38</sup> The influence these authors had in the lives of others is hard to surmise, but it is worth considering that their vast reach indicates at least some amount of impact. Benjamin Franklin wrote in his autobiography that he read Dr. Mather's *Essays to do Good*, and that it "...perhaps gave me a turn of thinking that had an influence on some of the principal future events of my life."<sup>39</sup>

Once again, information gleaned from the NAIP studies does not definitively prove that people read Christian authors and agreed with the authors' conclusions. However, they do demonstrate what sort of material printing presses were releasing for the public, and it follows that the general public likely desired to read the type of material being produced. It can also be assumed that these authors' ideas were familiar among the reading public, a growing demographic. Since data from the press indicates that a large amount of Christian literature was available, it becomes more reasonable to consider that people would value Christian ideas and biblical ideas, of which may have been political Hebraism. It seems logical that people would seek to understand the Old Testament as a political text as well, not only as a religious one. When the foundation of eighteenth-century education is understood and what sort of materials from the press are evaluated, it becomes understandable that a natural inclination by

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 517-518.

<sup>39</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, 20.

people would be to evaluate political ideas by what the Old Testament would say about political structure.

For this same reason, it would also be beneficial to evaluate what particular authors were popular during the eighteenth-century. When in view, authors, and the most popular titles will demonstrate what was popular and any change in ideas will be observable. Popular authors and titles will show that the Bible in general, and the Old Testament in particular were popular and would continue to be popular, even as more political work came to the press. Demonstrating that the Bible and the Old Testament were indeed well known will support the concept that people during the Revolution would seek to understand what scripture had to say about political structure.

David Hall and Russell Martin are two scholars who turned to the NAIP to seek an answer to the question of, "What books and authors did American printers and booksellers choose to publish most often or most persistently?"<sup>40</sup> Hall and Russell state that while most authors are represented by one record there is one author who surpasses all other authors, Cotton Mather accounting for 335 records. As for as "durability," the authors who were continually reprinted, Isaac Watts and John Bunyan are the only two authors who were printed at least once over a span of eighty years.<sup>41</sup> Whether the author had the most printed titles recorded, or the titles that were printed over a longer period of time than any other authors, all three men were religious figures who used their words to teach from the Bible.

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<sup>40</sup> David Hall, "A Note on Popular and Durable Authors and Titles," 519.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 520.

While popular authors tell who was being printed during what years along with who was printed over a great span of time, it can also be helpful to look at what particular titles were popular. Hall writes that reflecting on titles points more acutely to the cultural shift from almost solely religious works before 1760 to political titles making their appearance as the Revolution drew near. The *Bay Psalm Book*, along with other Psalm books, and the authorized version of the Psalms were all leading titles in the eighteenth-century. Other works that made strong appearances were *Sacramental Exercises*, *Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism*, the sermon collection *Three Practical Discourses, Communicant's Companion*, and Robert Russell's *Seven Sermons*. Similar religious titles can continue to be listed, yet the only other title of note outside the religious scope before the 1760's was the *New England Primer*.<sup>42</sup> Educational and religious titles "continued to dominate," but after 1760 a "new phenomenon" came to be with the reprinting of political pamphlets.<sup>43</sup> Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* is the most iconic example in the popularity of political pamphlets. Another notable political title for multiple prints was Jonathan Shipley's *A Speech Intended to Have Been Spoken on the Bill for Altering the Charter of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*.<sup>44</sup>

Educational material, literary genres, popular authors, and durable titles all show a religious and biblical trend in American print material. In *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880*, Paul Gutjahr writes that, "dating back to the Puritans, Americans have long enjoyed the nickname "A People of the Book.""<sup>45</sup> The *Bay Psalm*

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 521.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>45</sup> Paul C Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880*, 1; see also Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 13; Joseph Gaer and Ben Siegel, *The Puritan Heritage: America's Roots in*

*Book*, Martin Luther's translations of the New Testament and Psalms, and Isaac Watts' version of the Psalms were all popular titles for prints and reprints and various times in the eighteenth-century. It is worth noting that at this point that the Bible did not appear on the list of printed material (other than parts of the Bible) since the English translation of the Bible was not printed in the colonies prior to the American Revolution. This reality was due to the British Crown's monopoly "restricting the publication of the King James Bible to the King's printers."<sup>46</sup> This contributed to why Psalm books, New Testaments, and other religious works were popular prints, but the entire Bible does not make its appearance in print records until after 1777.

Eric North wrote that, when considering American history, Christianity and the Bible possessed a great influence that one can "trace" as they "mold the life and ideas of a nation as it rose from small beginnings to greatness."<sup>47</sup> Evidence of the importance of the Bible in colonial life is witnessed by more than large amount of prints of the New Testament and Psalms. While the Atlantic voyage was a long and difficult one, "Bibles from England and Holland were often listed in the goods advertised in local newspapers as "just arrived" along with textiles and household necessities."<sup>48</sup> Religious material was in high demand from the printing press, and Bibles, due to the Crown's restrictions through copyright and the expense of printing a text that large, were shipped to the colonies from Europe. With the outbreak of the

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*the Bible* (New York: New American Library, 1964); Robert Baird, *Religion in America: The Origin, Progress, Relation to the State, and Present Condition of the Evangelical Churches in the United States*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1844) 59; and Stephen J Stein, "America's Bibles: Canon, Commentary, and Community," *Church History* 64:2 (June 1995) 184.

<sup>46</sup> Margaret Hills, *The English Bible in America; A Bibliography of Editions of the Bible and the New Testament Published in America, 1777-1957*, xv; see also Paul C Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880*, 6; Alden, "The Bible as Printed Word," in Ernest S. Frerichs, *The Bible and Bibles in America*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 14.

<sup>47</sup> Eric M North in, Margaret Hills, *The English Bible in America; A Bibliography of Editions of the Bible and the New Testament Published in America, 1777-1957*, v.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Hills, *The English Bible in America*, xv.

American Revolution, Bibles became scarce and the Continental Congress voted to import 20,000 Bibles from Holland at the government's expense on September 11, 1777.<sup>49</sup>

Congress never had the opportunity to follow through with importing these Bibles since they had to flee from Philadelphia due to the arrival of the British. However, around that time, printers from Philadelphia, Trenton, Boston, and Wilmington, began to take on the challenge of printing the entire Bible in English for the first time in North America. Robert Aitken, a printer and bookseller from Philadelphia who worked with the Continental Congress, undertook the printing of a New Testament in English, which appeared in 1777, with other additions printed in 1778, 1779, and 1781 and an entire Bible by 1782.<sup>50</sup> Considering these details, Gutjahr states that the Bible was the “most imported, most printed, most distributed, and most read text in North America.”<sup>51</sup>

Reflecting on known data dealing with literacy, printing, distribution, and authorship, religious material clearly dominated the printing press through the eighteenth-century. Literacy continued to grow. It is thought that the majority of the population was literate by the time of the Revolution.<sup>52</sup> Not only were educational books like *The New England Primer* printed often and over a long period of time, but they also contained content that was distinctly Christian and Biblical. The Bible itself and its parts were printed and distributed more than any other book. In fact, upon its creation in the early nineteenth-century, the American Bible

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, xvi.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Paul C Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880*, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Ross Beales and Jennifer Monaghan, “Literacy and Schoolbooks,” *A History of the Book in America*, 380; see also Kenneth Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Inquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974) 13, 28; Gloria Main, “An Inquiry into When and Why Women Learned to Write in Colonial New England,” *Journal of Social History* 24 (1991) 580.

Society would strive to “provide a Bible for every household in America.”<sup>53</sup> Each of these bits of data points to a culture that knew and sought to understand the Bible. Consider these as pieces of a puzzle that, when assembled, demonstrate the importance of a book within a culture. Such a picture provides insight as to why those during the American Revolution would seek to understand what the Bible had to teach about political structure in society.

Questions may still remain about enlightenment thought and its influence on Revolutionary America. After all, as seen in chapter one, an immense amount of scholarship has been conducted on classical republicanism, and many scholars have demonstrated the influence of men like John Locke on revolutionaries. Donald Lutz conducted a study to evaluate what European authors had influence on American political thought. In his study, writings were reviewed that contained “explicitly political content.” These included “books, pamphlets, newspaper articles, and monographs printed for public consumption.”<sup>54</sup> Lutz considered that previous historians such as Bailyn had previously attempted to evaluate the influence of a particular school of thought, yet he concluded that was too nuanced an endeavor to be successful. While Bailyn divided sources into five major groups, classical antiquity, Enlightenment rationalism, English common law, Puritanism, and English commonwealth, other scholars used different groups or placed certain philosophers in a group that differed from Bailyn. As such, Lutz looked to individual authors, or philosophers, that were quoted in American print, instead of schools of thought.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Paul C Gutjahr, *An American Bible*, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Donald Lutz, “The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought,” *The American Political Science Review*, 191.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 189-190.

In Lutz's findings, he noted that "the prominence of Blackstone," was surprising, especially considering "his work is not readily available in inexpensive form."<sup>56</sup> Yet, for the consideration of this paper, there is a more important observation made by Lutz. He wrote that, "It is relevant, nonetheless, to note the prominence of biblical sources for American Political thought, since it was highly influential in our political tradition, and is not always given the attention it deserves."<sup>57</sup> Not only that, but the single most quoted item within all books and pamphlets and newspaper articles that dealt with politics was the book of Deuteronomy.<sup>58</sup> It should be kept in mind that Deuteronomy is considered to be a political document for Ancient Israel. As such, Lutz's findings fully support the idea that those in the American Revolution were being influenced by Jewish scriptures as political texts. To be sure, quotations do not indicate either support or rejection of the ideas being expressed. Thus, for a revolutionary to quote Deuteronomy, it does not necessarily indicate his support for its civic structure nor his rejection. Nevertheless, it does demonstrate a familiarity with the text's contents, not only that of the speaker but also that of the intended recipients.

Colonial America possessed a system of education that purposed to advance Christianity. This reality was expressed in educational laws of Massachusetts and further supported by a Virginia apprenticeship law which said overseers and guardians of orphans were required to instruct them in the Christian religion.<sup>59</sup> Educational books taught stories and

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 192.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*; Lutz full quote reads, "If we ask what book was most frequently cited by Americans during the founding era, the answer somewhat surprisingly is: the Book of Deuteronomy. From Table 1 we can see that the biblical tradition is most prominent amount the citations."

<sup>59</sup> "Virginia Apprenticeship Law (1643)," *Education in the United States*, 342.

expressed ideas directly from the Bible.<sup>60</sup> Not only was education and Christian teaching closely tied, but religious material dominated the presses and was the material most available to the public. Furthermore, the Bible was the most printed and distributed book far beyond all other printed material. The culmination of this research is not used to argue that the United States is a distinctly Christian country. Instead, it is indicative of why Americans would so readily turn to political Hebraism in their political discussions and attempt to learn from Hebrew scripture along with other theories. It should be well understood not only that people turned to the Old Testament for political discussion, but why they did. Because it was a stated purpose from early settlements, embedded in early laws, contained in education, written about extensively, because people in Revolutionary America knew and valued scripture, a fact proved by what they quoted.

Before gleaning what passages of the Old Testament were used in sermons and political discourses, establishing the familiarity of the American public of the Revolution with these topics is critical. Eighteenth-century culture was vastly different than that of today. It is this difference that is possibly part of the reason that scholarship has bifurcated the study of republicanism and politics from that of church history. Yet is for this very reason that, in order to understand the real grip of political Hebraism, appreciating its ties in the educational system, printed materials, and political discourse quotations is vital. Since this has been established,

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<sup>60</sup> See colonial educational books such as *The New-England Primer Improved For the More Easy Attaining of the True Reading of English: To Which is Added the Assembly of Divines and Mr. Cotton's Catechism* (Boston: Edward Draper, Newbury Street, 1777); . *A New Guide to the English Tongue: In Five Parts* (Philadelphia: Printed and sold by B. Franklin, 1747); or *The English Instructor or, The Art of Spelling Improved. Being a More Plain, Easy, and Regular Method of Teaching Young Children, Than Any Extant* (Boston; J. Draper, 1736).

the next chapter can deal more precisely with what biblical material was used in political discussions.

### Chapter Three – Hebraism in Eighteenth-Century Election Day Sermons

“Government is a natural and a divine ordinance, and when tolerably answering the good ends of it, ought quietly to be submitted to, for conscience sake.”<sup>1</sup> -Abraham Williams

Thomas Jefferson is a well-known Revolutionary and will long be remembered for penning the words to the Declaration of Independence, which says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”<sup>2</sup> John Adams, Patrick Henry, George Washington, James Madison, and other political or military leaders are known for their involvement in the American Revolution. Yet, there is another group of leaders who are often overlooked and whose contribution is underrealized. This group is comprised of religious leaders who were teaching and preaching about government structure during the period before revolutionary hostilities erupted, during the American Revolution, and then during the beginning years of the country’s republic. A complete understanding of America’s revolutionary story should include what the religious leaders taught and how they utilized and reasoned from the Old Testament since religious literature and scripture was dominant in the eighteenth-century culture. The teachings of these leaders reveal that they promoted virtues of government instituted by God, advocated for the implementation and execution of moral government, demonstrated and assumed an intimate

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham Williams, “An Election Sermon, Boston, 1762,” 18.

<sup>2</sup> “The Declaration of Independence,” in *The U.S. Constitution and Other Key American Writings*, 5.

knowledge of Hebrew scripture while using the Old Testament to advocate for their political position.

Patricia Bonomi argues that “...the idiom of religion penetrated all discourse, underlay all thought, marked all observances, gave meaning to every public and private crisis” during the eighteenth-century.<sup>3</sup> If that is a true statement, it stands to reason that an important part of fully comprehending what ideas were instrumental in revolutionary thought would be understanding what religious leaders were teaching. In this same vein, Spencer McBride argues that clergymen are “central to any understanding of American political culture” and even in grasping a “collective identity” within the American public.<sup>4</sup> Bonomi and McBride’s arguments complement a study of Donald Lutz that found that “...at least 10% of all [political] pamphlets published” during the founding period were printed sermons.<sup>5</sup> Reading through the political discourse and understanding of the likes of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John Adams, while important, is not a comprehensive view of the political debate in the American colonies in the eighteenth-century. Understanding how the clergy taught, what they taught, and how that teaching changed aids in shaping a fuller picture of changing attitudes and ideas toward government, ideas that prove to be rooted in the ancient texts of the Hebrews.

Considering how literacy during the 18<sup>th</sup> century rose through implementation of education, that religious literature was the largest category of printed material, and that the Bible was the most quoted work, it is important to grasp the actual concepts and arguments

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<sup>3</sup> Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Spencer McBride, *Pulpit and Nation: Clergymen and the Politics of Revolutionary America*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Lutz, “The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought,” *The American Political Science Review*, 192.

being made by the religious leaders.<sup>6</sup> Since it is known that sermons were heard, printed, reprinted, and distributed, what was it that they were teaching? What passages from the Old Testament were utilized and how were they used to support political positions?

In *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*, Daniel Dreisbach references the work of Lutz on the intellectual influences in the eighteenth-century on American political thought. Dreisbach points out that, while many scholars cite Lutz's study in reference to the Bible's frequent use in the eighteenth-century, these scholars along with Lutz fail to analyze how people used Old Testament texts.<sup>7</sup> With this in mind, answering the question of what sort of passages from the Old Testament were used in political teaching and how those passages were employed facilitates further understanding of the influenced of the Jewish civic structure found in the Old Testament.

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<sup>6</sup> See chapter two; see also Ross Beales and Jennifer Monaghan, "Practices of Reading," in *A History of the Book in America*, 380; Kenneth A. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Inquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974) 13, 28; Gloria L. Main, "An Inquiry Into When and Why Women Learned to Write in Colonial New England," *Journal of Social History*, 24 (1991): 580; Donald Lutz, "The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought," *The American Political Science Review*, 191.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Dreisbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*, 72; See also, expanding research dealing with religion and the clergy's political contributions; see Catherine Albanese, *Sons of the Fathers: The Civil Religion of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1976); Baldwin, *New England Clergy and the American Revolution*; Davis, *Religion and the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*; Dreisbach and Hall, *Faith and the Founders of the American Republic*; Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966); Humphrey, *Nationalism and Religion in America, 1174-1789*; James H. Hutson, *Church and State in America: The First Two Centuries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Hutson, *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic*; Thomas Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Mark A. Noll, *Christians in the American Revolution* (Washington, DC: Christian University Press, 1977); Michael Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and common Sense at the American Founding* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2002); Spencer McBride, *Pulpit and Nation: Clergymen and the Politics of Revolutionary America*; Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War*; Ellis Sandoz, *Republicanism, Religion, and the Soul of America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006); Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

The following is a brief analysis of several election day sermons that were delivered from the mid to the late eighteenth-century. The goal is to evaluate how these practitioners of the Christian faith utilized the Hebrew texts as a political document, what texts they used, and how their use changed over time. This chapter will explore sermons from before the American Revolution, sermons preached during the Revolution itself, sermons from the process of developing and ratifying the Constitution, and finally sermons following the ratification of the Constitution. While analyzing sermons from all these periods, observations will be made based upon what texts selected for political sermons and how those texts were used to support the clergy's central point. Supplementary materials used within the sermons to further points, including any additional Hebrew texts utilized, will be evaluated. The clergy's usage of the text will also be considered, whether a direct reference was provided or familiarity with the reference was assumed.

A certain amount of background information is helpful in order to better understand an analysis of eighteenth-century sermons. One important concept that was taught and believed by the people with a variety of backgrounds and needs to be part of dialogue dealing with political Hebraism is that, well before and especially during the Revolution, American colonists viewed themselves as a new Israel.<sup>8</sup> Abiel Abbot, a clergyman from Massachusetts,

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<sup>8</sup> The concept that early Americans viewed themselves as a new Israel has been noted by scholars in Hebraic studies and those who study Puritans in New England, for some reference in Hebraic work see Eran Shalev, "Perfect Republic" The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788," (*The New England Quarterly*, Vol 82, No 2 (June 2009)) 235-263; Shalev also notes that those in England thought of themselves as "second Israel, a notion perhaps first expressed in John Foxe's...*The Acts and Monuments* (1563)," Some in England during this period "closely studied the Old Testament, the political structures of the republic of the Hebrews in particular," a quote from Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment*, 45,66; see also Christopher Hill, *The English bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1993); Miriam Bodian, "Biblical Hebrews and the Rhetoric of Republicanism: Seventeenth-Century Portuguese Jews on the Jewish Community," (*AJS Review*. Vol 22, No 2 (1997)) 199-221; Bodian, "The Biblical Jewish Republic and the Dutch New Israel in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Thought," (*Hebraic Political Studies*, 1, No 2 (2006)) 186-202; Andrew Murphy, "New Israel in New England:

commented that “...it has been often remarked that the people of the United States came nearer to a parallel with Ancient Israel, than any other nation upon the globe. Hence, ‘our American Israel,’ is a term frequently used; and common consent allows it apt and proper.”<sup>9</sup> Not only does Abbot indicate such a parallel was common, but he also stated that an often-used phrase of the time was “our American Israel.” Beyond the public observation of this cultural phenomenon was Abbot’s position that the comparison is “apt and proper.”<sup>10</sup>

Abbot was not alone in his comments from the pulpit. Samuel Cooper, a clergyman and a friend of Benjamin Franklin, preached that “Like [Israel] we were led into a wilderness, as a refuge from tyranny,” as he referred to the war with Britain.<sup>11</sup> Joseph Huntington was more direct at the end of the Revolution as he preached, “...these Thirteen United States or tribes of Israel,” making a clear comparison in language and civil structure between America and Israel.<sup>12</sup> And, John Murray, while preaching from Judges chapter eight, made the statement that, “Connected as it is with...the four chapters that surround it—the text exhibits a case as nearly resembling our own, as ancient fashions can be accommodated to modern times.”<sup>13</sup> The instances of clergy making a parallel between the two nations, especially during the Revolution,

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The American Jeremiad and the Hebrew Scriptures,” (*Hebraic Political Studies*, Vol 4, no 2 (Spring 2009)) 128-156; David Hall, “Toward a History of Popular Religion in Early New England,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* (41, no 1 (1984) 49-55); Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, (Harvard University Press, 1983); Mark Knoll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492-1783*, (Oxford University Press, 2015); Harry S Stout, *New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Abiel Abbot, *Traits of Resemblance in the People of the United States of America to Ancient Israel*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Cooper, *A Sermon Preached Before His Excellency John Hancock, Esq; Governour, He Honourable the Senate, and the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, October 25, 1780*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Huntington, *A Discourse, Adapted to the Present Day, on the Health and Happiness, or Misery and Ruin, of the Body Politic, in Similitude to that of the Natural Body*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> John Murray, *Jerubball, Or Tyranny’s Grove Destroyed, and the Altar of Liberty Finished. A Discourse on America’s Duty and Danger, Delivered at the Presbyterian Church in Newbury-Port, December 11, 1783*, 8.

are ample. These examples in particular are taken from many Old Testament texts including Judges 8, Deuteronomy 33, comparisons from Jeremiah, and from the story in Exodus.

This concept was not unique to American colonists. It was adopted by some in England and other nations after the Reformation.<sup>14</sup> One rhetorical and literary device that demonstrates this concept in the colonies is the “jeremiad.” Andrew Murphy points out the jeremiad “...evoked the long line of Hebrew prophets who, driven by a sense of crisis and a deep anxiety about their community’s spiritual health, lamented Israel’s violation of its covenant as a story of decline” and that its style has been part of the American political and literary tradition for a long time.<sup>15</sup> The reality that the jeremiad was as prevalent as it was provides insight in understanding how the Old Testament was used, how it was understood, and why people in America viewed themselves as a new Israel. Joining the ancient prophets, colonial ministers lamented their disobedience as a rejection of their covenant with God and as such indicated that the people were inviting punishment from God.<sup>16</sup>

During early colonial settlement, especially in New England, many people sought to implement lessons from “...God’s dealings with the Hebrew commonwealth.”<sup>17</sup> While these

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<sup>14</sup> Miriam Bodian, “Biblical Hebrews and the Rhetoric of Republicanism: Seventeenth-Century Portuguese Jews on the Jewish Community,” (*AJS Review*. Vol 22, No 2 (1997)) 199-221; see also Andrew Murphy, “New Israel in New England: The American Jeremiad and the Hebrew Scriptures;” Eran Shalev, ““A Perfect Republic”: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788;” Kalman Neuman, “Political Hebraism and the Early Modern ‘Respublica Hebraeorum’: On Defining the Field;” Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, (Harvard University Press, 1983).

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Murphy, “New Israel in New England: The American Jeremiad and the Hebrew Scriptures,” 128.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*; see also Perry Miller, “Declension in a Bible Commonwealth,” in Miller, *Nature’s Nation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967); Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1953); Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); Andrew R. Murphy, *Prodigal Nation: Moral Decline and Divine Punishment from New England to 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Dreisbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*, 88.

lessons expressed themselves in the jeremiad, they did not go away as the settlements grew nor as the seventeenth-century progressed into the eighteenth. Dreisbach describes this as a “...ubiquitous theme in the literature of Puritan New England” and that as the founding period of the Revolution approached the “...American experience was analogous to that of the Children of Israel exiting slavery in Egypt.”<sup>18</sup> It was popular among American colonists to consider themselves as another Israel, something that began to evidence itself more as the revolution took place.<sup>19</sup> This phenomenon provides insight toward helping comprehend how deeply those in the eighteenth-century related not only to the Jewish state but also to the text of Hebrew scripture in particular. It also shows that people viewed their circumstances in the perspective of a community and not only of the individual. People related the circumstances of the Old Testament to their society as a whole, not just themselves, an important perspective to keep in mind.

Education in the colonial period centered around the idea people needed to read in order to understand scripture and comprehend the laws of the land.<sup>20</sup> Reading books were

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*; see also Sacvan Bercovitch, “The Biblical Basis of the American Myth,” in *The Bible and American Arts and Letters*, ed Giles Gunn (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1983); Gael and Siegel, *Puritan Heritage*, 26.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Dreisbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*, 66, 88-90; for further scholarship relating to the concept of colonial settlers viewing themselves as a new Israel see also Gaer and Siegel, *Puritan Heritage: America’s Roots in the Bible*, (New York New American Library, 1964) 26; Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); see the introduction in Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War*, (Yale University Press, 2013); Mark Noll, *God and Race in American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 24-25; Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) William R. Hutchison and Hartmut Lehmann, *Many are Chosen: Divine Election and Western Nationalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); For Hebraic influences in America see Shalom Goldman, *God’s Sacred Tongue: Hebrew and the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Bruce Feiler, *America’s Prophet: Moses and the American Story* (New York: William Morrow, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> See laws such as “Massachusetts School Law of 1642,” in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History, Vol 1*, ed Sol Cohen, 393; see also Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience 1607-1783*; Sol Cohen, *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*.

peppered with biblical allusions and scriptural quotations.<sup>21</sup> As the printing records have been evaluated, it is clear that religious material, including printed sermons, comprised the largest amount of material available in the eighteenth-century.<sup>22</sup> These facts aid in a proper understanding of not only what the culture was like before the revolution but also why those people would turn to sacred texts to understand the world around them. Properly understanding these things should point to the fact that what religious leaders were teaching, how they taught, and from what they taught are of utmost importance in gaining a complete picture of understanding political discussion during the revolutionary period.

Reflecting on the facts that the jeremiad was a frequently employed rhetorical style and that those in colonial America viewed themselves as a new Israel is important. It demonstrates that the Old Testament was a familiar text. Not only was it used, but people also reflected on its imagery and lessons to an extent that allowed them to align their own circumstances with that of the Jews.

## Mid-Century Sermons

Well before animosities between colonists and Great Britain developed, Samuel Phillips delivered an election day sermon on May 31, 1750 from Proverbs 8:15-16, which states, "By me

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<sup>21</sup> For educational books replete with Biblical language see Thomas Dilworth, *A New Guide to the English Tongue: In Five Parts* (Philadelphia: Printed and sold by B. Franklin, 1747); Henry Dixon, *The English Instructor or, The Art of Spelling Improved. Being a More Plain, Easy, and Regular Method of Teaching Young Children, Than Any Extant* (. Boston; J. Draper, 1736); and John Cotton, *The New-England Primer Improved For the More Easy Attaining of the True Reading of English: To Which is Added the Assembly of Divines and Mr. Cotton's Catechism*, (Boston: Edward Draper, Newbury Street, 1777).

<sup>22</sup> Hugh Amory, "Appendix One: Note on Statistics," in *A History of the Book in America*, 515-518; see also David Hall and Russell Marin's chapter in the same book, "A Note on Popular and Durable Authors and Titles," in *A History of the Book in America: Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, 519.

Kings reign, and Princes decree justice: By me Princes rule, and Nobles, even all the Judges of the earth.” Phillips’ oration began with a reminder for his fellow citizens to “...give thanks to God almighty” for the liberties they continued to enjoy from their royal charter, which dictated their relationship with Great Britain.<sup>23</sup> Phillips’ first point based upon the Proverbs passage did not take a position that one form of government was superior over any other. Instead he commented that a probable reason for listing the various forms of power in the passage was to merely “...refer to the various forms of civil government which are in the world; ...for the expression is applicable to each of them.”<sup>24</sup> It is notable that Phillips did not begin by using the Old Testament to springboard into a diatribe of what form of government was best. Instead, he remained pointed and articulated that the text showed the purpose of any form of government was to “...decree justice...and not only decree, but also execute the same.”<sup>25</sup>

After Phillips asserted his main point, he moved on to say that all authority in man-made government is given by Jesus Christ. A myriad of New Testament passages were employed to theologially expand his argument. Phillips’ next assertion to his audience was that the Hebrew scripture was not “...speaking of any particular form of government; for it does not appear, that any one form or species of civil government is established by Christ: Nay, but this matter seems to be left to the genius and prudence of each nation and language.”<sup>26</sup> Phillips’ statement asserted that, according to a Hebrew proverb that speaks to civil authority, one particular form of government had not been clearly established by God over any other form. However, civil

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<sup>23</sup> Samuel Phillips, *Political Rulers Authoriz’d and Influenc’d by God Our Saviour, to Decree and Execute Justice*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Samuel Phillips, *Political Rulers Authoriz’d*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Phillips, *Political Rulers Authoriz’d*, 6.

authority in general was an institution set in place with the purpose of implementing and executing just law.

Phillips demonstrated a certain pattern in which the clergy used Hebrew texts for their political sermons. After Phillips's central argument in favor of just government was established from a Hebrew text, in this case Proverbs, he went back to the content of the Torah without giving direct reference to the passages he utilized. Phillips began this subsequent section of his sermon by referring to Exodus and the encounter of Moses at the burning bush. He pointed out that Moses and Joshua after him were divinely appointed to lead the various tribes of Israel. Following the period of Moses and Joshua, Phillips said "...judges being authorized from heaven, presided over Israel successively." And then, "...there was a succession of Kings, and that by the express direction and appointment of the most-high."<sup>27</sup> Phillips, without providing direct reference, used content from the Torah, the same text as the clergy that would come after him, in order to further solidify his central point that all forms of government are permissible and that their purpose is to execute just law. He did not use the passages to advocate one form of government was divinely instituted over another. Instead, he said that the succession of Kings was a divine appointment. Furthermore, he stated that "...it appears, that although the Jews were (for a season) more directly ...under the divine government...it was the will of God that they should...be under the government of men."<sup>28</sup> In other words, Phillips' position was that civil structure was second to just law. While Phillips' position is different from

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Phillips, *Political Rulers Authoriz'd*, 7.

some that came after him, the most significant detail is not his position but the manner by which he arrived and provided its defense.

After Phillips' central point and reference to the Torah for further support, additional selections of Hebrew scripture furthered his argument. He continued the use of Proverbs 20:23 which says, "Divers weights are an abomination to the Lord, and a false balance is not good," along with Deuteronomy 25:13-15, "Thou shalt have a perfect and just weight; a perfect and just measure shalt thou have."<sup>29</sup> While the sermon of Phillips was designed to encourage his hearers to action, it was also a demonstration of a learned man in the eighteenth-century who evaluated political structures and purposes based the Hebrew scriptures. Phillips' sermon demonstrates American religious leaders' utilization of the Old Testament as a political document and lessons to others based on their understanding of the civic structure and purpose. In this case, the purpose was to establish and execute just law, a position he took before hostilities with Great Britain.

### **Eve of Animosity**

Now that benchmark of sorts has been set by evaluating Phillips' use of Hebrew text for political purpose, a comparison can be made not only to evaluate how other clergy used Hebrew text but also to consider whether their methods or conclusions deviated as the Revolution drew near. A young minister from the Boston area, Abraham Williams, delivered an

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

election sermon in 1762, a time well removed from Phillips and approaching initial dissension between colonies and Britain with the coming Stamp Act.

Unlike Phillips' sermon, Williams began his oration with a quotation from 1 Corinthians 12:25, "That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another."<sup>30</sup> While the introductory text is not from the Old Testament, Williams quickly stated that his introduction contained reasoning "...applicable to civil societies" and then built a logical argument based in Hebrew scripture.<sup>31</sup>

Williams's first claim after his introduction was that it was not good for man to be alone, a clear reference to the first book of the Torah, Genesis. He then built a logical argument for government rooted in the content of the Torah. Interestingly enough, he employed language that foreshadowed statements made in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Based on Williams interpretation of the account of creation in Genesis, he claimed that, " ...all men being naturally equal" possess "equal rights and properties." Yet despite that equality, the use and enjoyments of rights and property were "unequal," which was a result of mankind's rebellion from God.<sup>32</sup> Due to these unequal circumstances, Williams reasoned from the Torah that governments were created for and evolved within civil society.

At this point in his sermon, Williams referenced several passages of the Old Testament, including the very proverb that Phillips used for his sermon, with the purpose of further supporting his argument. Williams turned to Psalm 22, "...the Kingdom is the Lords, and he is

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<sup>30</sup> Abraham Williams, "An Election Sermon, Boston, 1762," in *American Political Writings During the Founding Era*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

Governor among the nations; Proverbs 8, “By him Kings reign, and princes decree justice, even all the judges of the earth; Daniel 2, “He has made the earth, and given it to whom it seemeth meet to him; and Daniel 4, “He changes times and seasons, and ruleth in the Kingdoms of men.”<sup>33</sup>

Williams followed a pattern similar to other clergy, like Phillips, in opening with a biblical text, then building a political position rooted in Hebrew texts outside of the introductory passage. These clergy do not merely utilize additional passages of Hebrew origin; they often do so without referencing their quotations. This demonstrates familiarity with the text, the common use of Old Testament to reason in political views, and an assumption that the additional passages are known to the listeners.

Williams based his understanding on the Torah in order to prove a claim about the nature of mankind that related to a fundamental principle of government. His ultimate conclusion was that government has a good purpose, no matter the form, even if some forms may be superior to others. Yet for success in government, a society should “...encourage and maintain social public worship of the deity, and instructions in righteousness; for without social virtues, societies can’t subsist.”<sup>34</sup> Williams and Phillips not only followed the same pattern of use in their political discourse based on Hebrew scripture, but they also came to similar conclusions; a virtuous government, one that erected and executed just law, was imperative for civil society and as such was of the ultimate value.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Abraham Williams, “An Election Sermon, Boston, 1762,” 6.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

A telling conclusion in Williams' oration, considering its proximity to the coming hostilities, is that he exhorted his listeners to "...gratefully acknowledge the goodness of divine providence, in favoring us with so wise and good a civil government: a constitution the best proportioned and adapted to answer the ends of civil society...a government, so prudently and righteously administered, that most of our laws are just and reasonable."<sup>36</sup> Here Williams, like Phillips, delivered a sermon based on Hebrew texts that speak to purpose of political structure. Each of these clergymen used Hebrew texts to communicate the value of just government and communicated gratitude that they participated in a society with a just and righteous government.

Even though clergymen viewed the colonies as representing a new Israel similarly, they did not always draw the same conclusions about the form of government as described in the Hebrew scriptures. Samuel Langdon, the religious leader and president of Harvard College, stated in 1775 that the Jewish constitution was, "...if considered merely in a civil view...a perfect Republic" and "divinely established," a distinct difference from that of Williams and Phillips.<sup>37</sup> Langdon's position, articulated during the Revolution, was that Hebrew scripture supported a republic government over other forms and this view was not novel. More is involved in understanding how religious leaders understood the Hebrew scriptures and how they articulated their views of the Hebraic civic structure that deserves exploration. Eran Shalev suggests that the political history of Israel is contained in the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua,

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<sup>36</sup> Abraham Williams, "An Election Sermon, Boston, 1762," 12.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Langdon, *Government Corrupted by Vice, and Recovered by Righteousness*, 11.

Judges, and 1 and 2 Samuel.<sup>38</sup> However, it should be considered that while Shalev is correct that most of the political history is contained in those books, the events of Exodus are paramount to understanding how clergy used the Old Testament as well. After evaluating several sermons, it becomes clear that the entire Torah, or the first five books of the Old Testament are all well-known and utilized. Exodus and Deuteronomy do, however, receive more attention than most. The second book of the Torah is Exodus and the last is Deuteronomy, a book that Daniel Elazar suggests is not only “...Israel’s ancient constitution,” but the “oldest complete constitution in our possession.”<sup>39</sup>

Exodus, the second book of the Torah, contains the story of God’s supernatural intervention on behalf of Israel and his delivering them from Egyptian bondage. Once Israel was released from captivity, God gave their leader, Moses, instructions on how Israel as a nation should live and govern themselves with their newfound freedom. Those events contained in Exodus are a story that American clergymen like Langdon, Williams, and Phillips all appealed to in order to make their own political point. Understanding the history of the Jews, along with how colonists understood and used that history, is more complex than God’s instituting a perfect republic in Exodus and detailing that republican constitution in Deuteronomy. Long after the Hebrews operated in their republic, they decided that they wanted a king. Eventually God granted their request in 1 Samuel 8. Much of the remaining history of the Hebrews is under monarchical rule. Ultimately, from Hebrew scripture, colonial

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<sup>38</sup> Eran Shalev makes this statement in, “A Perfect Republic”: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788,” 237, and he presents a note stating, “Other ancient sources include Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, which restated that history. Josephus’s works were printed in America between 1773 and 1800 in eight editions.”

<sup>39</sup> Daniel J Elazar, “Deuteronomy as Israel’s Ancient Constitution: Some Preliminary Reflections,” *Jewish Political Studies Review*, 4:1 (Spring 1992), 3.

clergymen attempted to answer the question of the purpose of government. Was the republic formed in Exodus and further articulated in Deuteronomy divinely inspired and superior to other forms of civic structure? Dependent upon their use of the Torah and interpretation of 1 Samuel 8, they would either view monarchy as sinful or acceptable.

Before the revolution, Williams and Phillips addressed the purpose of government while taking the position that the form of government was less important. Pre-revolutionary religious leaders lived in a period where their colony possessed a charter and set of laws for their area, yet they all were ultimately subservient to the crown. Thus, up to the point of the Revolution, it stands to reason that clergy were content with monarchical rule.<sup>40</sup> Yet tension between colonies and Britain would emerge a couple of years after Williams sermon. As political differences began to emerge it is possible to see a shift in clergy understanding of the Torah also. Considering earlier clergy possessed a clear focus on the necessity of just government, an interesting inquiry would be an investigation to answer the question: If the clergy's stance that the purpose of government was justice and morality, was that stance a leading ideological cause in the patriots' willingness to rebel against the crown?

Eric Nelson argues that a rabbinic, exclusivist interpretation of Deuteronomy 17 and 1 Samuel 8 led to an understanding by the clergy that Israel's request for a king was sinful.<sup>41</sup> This

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<sup>40</sup> See Eric Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution: Monarchy and the American Founding* (Harvard University Press, 2014) Nelson challenges the conventional understanding of how those in the colonies viewed monarchy and argues the patriots were challenging Parliaments ability to rule in the colonies more than the Kings. See also Jerrilyn Greene Marston, *King and Congress: The Transfer of Political Legitimacy, 1174-1776* (Princeton University Press, 1987); Nathan R. Perl-Rosenthal, "The Divine Right of Republics: Hebraic Republicanism and the Debate Over Kingless Government in Revolutionary America," in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, (Third Series, vol 66, no 3 (July 2009)) 535-564.

<sup>41</sup> Eric Nelson, "Talmudical Commonwealths and the Rise of Republican Exclusivism," *The Historical Journal*, (50, 4, (2007)) 809-835; see also Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, "The "Divine Right of Republics": Hebraic Republicanism and the Debate over Kingless Government in Revolutionary America." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, (Third Series, Vol 66, No 3 (July 2009)) 535-564.

idea that a theological shift took place just before the revolution should be apparent in election day sermons. It has already been established that colonists before and after the revolution alike viewed themselves as a “new Israel.” Did sermons during and after the revolution indicate a change in how clergy’s used the Old Testament to structure their sermons and elaborate on political Hebraism’s use for the United States? Or did the clergy’s sermons only demonstrate changing and differing interpretations of Hebrew texts while methods and sources used remained consistent? Sermons that were delivered during and after the Revolution do seem to follow the same structural patterns as before. However, as Nelson eludes to an interpretive shift, the election day sermons also seem to display a change in how clergy interpret Hebrew civic structure in the Torah.

### **Sermons from the Revolution**

James Dana was a clergyman from the New England area who was active during and after the Revolution. Dana preached a sermon in 1779 before the assembly of Connecticut from Jeremiah 18: 9, 10, which says, “And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation...to build and to plant it: If it do evil in my sight...then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them.” Dana declared that this passage, which speaks directly to the Jewish nation, was “peculiarly adapted to infant states.”<sup>42</sup> Dana elaborated that this indicated a “...general rule of the divine...towards political combinations” that would determine if the political structure would thrive or become ruined.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> James Dana, *A Sermon Preached Before the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, at Hartford, on the Day of the Anniversary Election, May 13, 1779*, 5.

<sup>43</sup> James Dana, *A Sermon Preached*, 5.

In the same fashion as Phillips before him, Dana selected a text from Hebrew scripture to support a central claim for his political sermon. Also, like Phillips and Williams, he quickly moved from his central passage, utilized the Torah, and assumed his audience's familiarity by forgoing references. He used the Torah, or his interpretation thereof, in order to support his political position as being derived from divinity. However, unlike Williams and Phillips who concluded that the Torah supported just government, Dana used the Torah to state that the "...only form of government expressly instituted by heaven was that of the Hebrews."<sup>44</sup> He then described the structure of the divinely established institution as a "confederate republic" where God was the head. According to Dana, Israel consisted of "...twelve distinct states; each sovereign in the administration of justice within itself" and that the states were united in common concerns.<sup>45</sup> Dana continued by saying the Hebrew constitution was also "...most friendly to public liberty."<sup>46</sup> In fact, Dana claimed that when Israel desired to "...change their constitution, God gave them a King in his anger," implying that it was wrong for the Jews to deviate from the political structure that God instituted in the Torah.<sup>47</sup> Dana's interpretive conclusion from Deuteronomy 17 informs his position from the passage he was preaching.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> James Dana, *A Sermon Preached*, 17.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>48</sup> How people interpret Deuteronomy 17 informs how 1 Samuel 8 is understood and subsequently the position the expositor takes on the proper or possible form of government structure, not just the role of government. For scholarship on the interpretive shift in Colonial America on this passage and what the root of that shift may have been see Eric Nelson, "Talmudical Commonwealths and the Rise of Republican Exclusivism," *The Historical Journal*, (50, 4, (2007)) 809-835; see also Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, "The 'Divine Right of Republics': Hebraic Republicanism and the Debate over Kingless Government in Revolutionary America." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, (Third Series, Vol 66, No 3 (July 2009)) 535-564.

Dana selected a portion of text from the prophet Jeremiah that spoke directly about how God would interact with a nation dependent upon their deeds. It seems likely that Williams or Phillips would have used this same text to support the same positions they did nearly twenty years before. Yet, unlike those before him, Dana was not content to focus primarily on the morality aspect of the text, but, instead, he incorporated details of the Torah in order to advocate for the proper form over function of government, at least in terms of Dana's understanding. To be sure, how Dana interpreted the role of a monarch from Deuteronomy 17 was informing how he understood the passage of Jeremiah and his political circumstances.

It is clear that Dana's conclusions about the form of civic structure differed drastically from the previous clergy. Outside of his conclusions, however, he selected similar texts, had a similar method, referenced the same supporting texts, and made indirect quotations just the same as previous clergy. He relied heavily on the Old Testament and particularly his interpretation of how the Torah should be understood while dealing with the civic structure of the Hebrews.

After he expanded on his ideas on the proper form of civic structure, Dana concluded that clergy should serve their communities and "...protect equally against civil and spiritual tyranny."<sup>49</sup> Not only did Dana clearly advocate that the Old Testament teaches the purest and wisest form of government was a republic, but he dealt with morality and politics in the same breath. Williams and Phillips advocated that God desired just government, a position that could have been supported by Dana's text, and that the form of government was less important. The only difference between text selection, structure of delivery, and use of the

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<sup>49</sup> James Dana, *A Sermon Preached*, 18.

Torah was that Dana used his understanding of the Torah to provide a different conclusion, something that ultimately shaped his interpretation of the text he selected for his central claim.

Dana's understanding and interpretation of the Torah shaped his exhortation that America should learn from the Jews by adopting a republican form of government. Not only should the colonies adopt a republican form of government, but in order to have any success as a community, clergy need to protect the civic structure as much as the spiritual and moral element in society. According to Dana, there was no bifurcation of politics and religion.<sup>50</sup>

Dana was not the only minister during the Revolution to advocate for this Hebraic form of republicanism. Samuel Cooper, a clergyman and a friend of Benjamin Franklin, preached a sermon in 1780 before the Senate and House of Representatives of Massachusetts the day that their state's constitution was placed in effect. Cooper delivered his sermon from Jeremiah 30:20-21 which says, "Their Congregation shall be established before me: and their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them."<sup>51</sup> As he began his delivery from the prophet of Jeremiah, Cooper said the "...prophecy seems to have been made for ourselves."<sup>52</sup> He also said this portion of Jeremiah was not the only passage that "...holds up to our view a striking resemblance between our own circumstances and those of the antient Israelites; a nation chosen by God a theatre for the display of some of the most astonishing dispensations of his providence."<sup>53</sup> Standing before the state government of Massachusetts,

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<sup>50</sup> James Dana, *A Sermon Preached*, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Samuel Cooper, *A Sermon Preached Before His Excellency John Hancock, Esq; Governour, He Honourable the Senate, and the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, October 25, 1780*, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Samuel Cooper, *A Sermon Preached*, 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

Cooper, through the words of Jeremiah, advocated for a particular form of government while following the trend of communicating that America was a “new Israel.”

Likewise, Cooper’s sermon carried on with the same patterns and methods of those clergy who came before him. Cooper selected a portion of scripture from which to preach, presented the scripture with a central claim for his argument, and proceeded to use Hebrew scripture outside of his initial selection to support his position on government. In this instance, Cooper utilized a Hebrew prophet to support his major claim and related the experience of Massachusetts, in particular, and the colonies, in general, to the Jews. After his introduction, he expanded his argument and relied on additional Hebrew scripture for support without citing his references. Like others, he also demonstrated an assumption his political audience was familiar with the additional texts he employed to expand his argument to government form.

Cooper declared that the form of government that God “originally established” for their nation was a “free republic” over which God “was pleased to preside.”<sup>54</sup> Cooper then moved on to describe the Hebrew republic as consisting of “...three parts; a chief magistrate who was called judge or leader, such as Joshua and others, a council of seventy chosen men, and the general assemblies of the people.”<sup>55</sup> He even elaborated on the Hebrews’ liberty when he stated that, despite the fact that God had designed the law of Moses, God did not “impose” it on the people “against their will.” Instead, according to Cooper, it was “laid open” before the Hebrew people and they “...freely adopted it and it became their law, not only by appointment, but by their own voluntary and express consent.”<sup>56</sup> This is a prime example of the clergy’s

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<sup>54</sup> Samuel Cooper, *A Sermon Preached*, 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

moving well beyond the central claim of their opening text to establish the importance of a particular interpretation of the Torah while supporting their claims without direct reference but instead relying on their audience's comprehension.

Cooper's sermon, delivered to the state government of Massachusetts, is an example of religious leaders' utilizing Hebrew texts and inserting the circumstances of the American colonies in place of Israel. Operating in such fashion continued to support the view of early Americans that they were in fact a "new Israel." Beyond that, it demonstrates eighteenth-century clergy were familiar with the Old Testament, utilized it often, and employed the Hebrew scriptures directly as a political document. "Such a constitution," said Cooper in reference to the law of Moses, demonstrates that "...civil and religious liberty" are human rights and that it "points out in general what kind of government infinite wisdom...would establish."<sup>57</sup> It is truly fascinating that, in each of these particular sermons, not one is preached directly on passages like Deuteronomy 17 or 1 Samuel 8, passages that deal much more directly with Israel's transition from republic to monarchy. Instead, each clergy attempted to expand on a different passage of scripture while his interpretation of the events of Deuteronomy and Samuel was central to whatever text upon which he expanded.

### **Post-Ratification Sermons**

Abiel Abbot delivered a sermon from Deuteronomy 33:29 which says, "Happy art thou, O Israel: Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of they help, and who is

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<sup>57</sup> Samuel Cooper, *A Sermon Preached*, 13-14.

the sword, of thy excellency!” At the beginning of Abbot’s sermon he said that it was “...often remarked,” that America was a parallel to Israel and that the comparison was “...apt and proper.”<sup>58</sup> Thus before Abbot expanded on the text at hand he already indicated his agreement in a comparison between the United States and Israel. In fact, he said one of his purposes was to “...apply the words of the text” that were originally directed toward Israel, to the United States since the text was “...very characteristic, to both nations.”<sup>59</sup> Abbot expressed that he wanted to compare Israel and the United States through the text by three “particulars,” namely: one, “The Happiness of Israel;” two, “Their distinction from other nations;” and three, “The source of both, divine favor.”<sup>60</sup>

Points made by Abbot and the manner in which he reasoned out of Deuteronomy are telling. According to Abbot, Moses wrote the words “happy art thou, O Israel” just before his death and as such must have been a “...prediction of [Israel’s] state in Canaan.”<sup>61</sup> He also said that, no matter the time that the words were uttered by Moses, they must not indicate that Israel’s happiness was to be predicated on material wealth. Instead, Abbot said that Israel’s happiness was based on possessing “true religion” and the best means of “virtue.”<sup>62</sup> He went on to say that while other ancient people groups fell into polytheism, the Jews retained their monotheist state, something that prevented religious corruption. Furthermore, he reminded his audience that the Jews were “...given a constitution and laws, written with the finger of God,” and that ultimately God himself was their nations king.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Abiel Abbot, *Traits of Resemblance in the People of the United States of America to Ancient Israel*, 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 7-8.

Further into Abbot's sermon, he began to expand on the idea of how the United States was like Israel in the passage of Deuteronomy that began, "Happy art thou, O Israel." Abbot had already reasoned that Israel possessed true religion which was a key to its happiness. He moved on to consider how the terms applied to America and argued that "We enjoy the blessing of religion and of government in their purest forms."<sup>64</sup>

Abbot's expressed intention was to compare Israel and the United States. This comparison was made after the Revolution was won and roughly two years after the Constitution was ratified. His perspective came from a position of a war already won, which was in effect, the same as Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Thus, both America and Israel had the ability to be happy by the enjoyment of true religion. In reference to government structure, Abbot said that America's "...constitution in one view is a perfect instrument; it contains a regenerating principle."<sup>65</sup> Abbot promoted a view that the republican form of government was most aligned with what is found in Israel as given by God.

Reviewing political sermons during the eighteenth-century reveals that by and large, no matter the timeframe, clergy held Hebrew scriptures in high regard. By and large these ministers selected a single text from which to preach, often from the Old Testament. Yet, the most remarkable features of the political sermon were in the consistent methodology throughout the century. They advocated for the just rule of law in the land, they demonstrated that both they and their audience were very familiar with Old Testament text, and they consistently used the Torah to support political positions. Yet, it does appear that while

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<sup>64</sup> Abiel Abbot, *Traits of Resemblance in the People of the United States of America to Ancient Israel*, 12.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

methods remained consistent, interpretations over the proper form of government changed during the American Revolution. Advocating for just government shifted to advocating for republican government. No matter the ultimate position of the clergy in terms of government structure, the ultimate consistency was their reliance on Hebrew text as a political document.

## Chapter Four – Hebraism Among American Statesmen

“I shall need, too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our forefathers, as Israel of old, from their native land, and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessaries and comforts of life; who has covered our infancy with his providence, and our riper years with his wisdom and power; and to whose goodness I ask you to join with me in supplications, that he will so enlighten the minds of your servants, guide their councils, and prosper their measures, that whatsoever they do, shall result in your good, and shall secure to you the peace, friendship, and approbation of all nations.” -Thomas Jefferson<sup>1</sup>

It stands to reason that eighteenth-century clergy were familiar with Old Testament scripture. How religious leaders used Hebrew text and how their use changed near the Revolution is much more significant. Chapter three discussed the clergy’s use of various scriptural texts, often from the Old Testament, to preach political sermons. After opening their argument with a central text, details from the Torah were recounted in order to support their political interpretation of Hebrew scripture. Thus, the role of the Torah was instrumental in using the Old Testament as a political document even if the clergy did not directly preach from the Torah as often as other selections. While dissecting the structure of political sermons is informative, it begs a central question. Did messages or content from the clergy manifest itself in the political leaders’ positions? Furthermore, how did those in the political realm understand or use Hebrew text for understanding civic structure during the period around the American Revolution? John Adams concluded that the Bible “...is the most republican book in the world, and therefore I will still revere it.”<sup>2</sup> Political revolutionaries, like Adams, and patriots

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jefferson, “Second Inaugural Address,” *Presidential Inaugural Addresses*, 22.

<sup>2</sup> John Adams, “John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 2 February 1807,” *Founders Online, National Archives*.

in American were well acquainted with the Hebrew text and used the same biblical arguments as contemporaneous clergy to support their political positions.

An interesting cultural signpost during the Revolution was that Americans viewed their nation as a parallel to Ancient Israel.<sup>3</sup> This observation was articulated by Abiel Abbot when he commented during a political sermon that this comparison, which allowed Americans to refer to themselves as “our American Israel,” was “apt and proper.”<sup>4</sup> While it may be expected that the clergy attempted to make such comparisons, did these ideas actually move beyond the pulpit and into the minds of political Americans?

Samuel Swift was a cohort of John Adams during the Revolution, and he also subscribed to the symmetry between Israel and the American colonies. Writing to John Adams in 1775, Swift said, “...and as Moses Guided under god the Israelites of Old so Let N. Anglus guide direct and steer this our New English Israel.”<sup>5</sup> Whether among the clergy or the patriot elite, people in the eighteenth-century understood their circumstances through a worldview predicated on

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<sup>3</sup> The concept that early Americans viewed themselves as a new Israel has been noted by scholars in Hebraic studies and those who study Puritans in New England, for some reference in Hebraic work see Eran Shalev, “Perfect Republic” The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788,” (*The New England Quarterly*, Vol 82, No 2 (June 2009)) 235-263; Shalev also notes that those in England thought of themselves as “second Israel, a notion perhaps first expressed in John Foxe’s...*The Acts and Monuments* (1563),” Some in England during this period “closely studied the Old Testament, the political structures of the republic of the Hebrews in particular,” a quote from Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment*, 45,66; see also Christopher Hill, *The English bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1993); Miriam Bodian, “Biblical Hebrews and the Rhetoric of Republicanism: Seventeenth-Century Portuguese Jews on the Jewish Community,” (*AJS Review*, Vol 22, No 2 (1997)) 199-221; Bodian, “The Biblical Jewish Republic and the Dutch New Israel in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Thought,” (*Hebraic Political Studies*, 1, No 2 (2006)) 186-202; Andrew Murphy, “New Israel in New England: The American Jeremiad and the Hebrew Scriptures,” (*Hebraic Political Studies*, Vol 4, no 2 (Spring 2009)) 128-156; David Hall, “Toward a History of Popular Religion in Early New England,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* (41, no 1 (1984) 49-55); Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, (Harvard University Press, 1983); Mark Knoll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492-1783*, (Oxford University Press, 2015); Harry S Stout, *New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Abiel Abbot, *Traits of Resemblance in the People of the United States of America to Ancient Israel*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Swift, “To John Adams from Samuel Swift, 13 March 1775.” *The Adams Papers*, Papers of John Adams, Vol 2, December 1773-April 1775.

the Old Testament. Adams wrote to his wife Abigail in 1776 after reflecting on a sermon in which the pastor had "...run a parallel between the case of Israel and that of America, and between the conduct of Pharaoh and that of George."<sup>6</sup> This letter from Adams was written two months before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In his letter, Adams reflected on the circumstances between the colonies and Britain and how those circumstances should best understood after hearing how a clergyman used the Old Testament to compare colonial circumstances with that of Israel and Egypt. He went on to confide in his wife, "When I consider the great events which are passed, and those greater which are rapidly advancing, and that I may have been instrumental of touching some springs, and turning some small wheels, which have had and will have such effects, I feel an awe upon my mind, which is not easily described."<sup>7</sup>

In a letter, George Washington made a parallel between America and Israel that reflects the sentiment of Abbot. Washington expressed his hope that the same "...wonder-working Deity, who long since delivering the Hebrews from their Egyptian Oppressors...whose providential agency has lately been conspicuous in establishing these United States as an independent nation" would continue grant them both temporal and spiritual blessings.<sup>8</sup> Even Washington was willing to make a connection between the establishment of the United States and the deliverance of Israel from Egypt by the power of God. In order for Washington to make such a claim, he had to be familiar with the content of the Torah in order to use it to better

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<sup>6</sup> John Adams, "John Adams to Abigail Adams, 17 May 1776." *The Adams Papers, Adams Family Correspondence*. Vol 1. December 1761-May 1776.

<sup>7</sup> John Adams, "John Adams to Abigail Adams, 17 May 1776." *The Adams Papers, Adams Family Correspondence*. Vol 1. December 1761-May 1776.

<sup>8</sup> George Washington, "From George Washington to the Savannah, Ga. Hebrew Congregation, 14 June 1790." *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*, vol 5, 16 January 1790 – 30 June 1790.

understand their current circumstances. It could be argued that Washington and others did not believe the content of the scriptures, but that argument is not effective in taking away from what is actually being communicated. Even if some did not believe the content, the fact that they would still appeal to it in order to communicate within their culture demonstrates that most were not only familiar with the material but also used it to understand events that took place around them.

Beyond Washington's personal reference to the parallel between the United States and Israel is his contemporaries' willingness to compare Washington to Moses. Daniel Driesbach says that Washington's fellow patriots described him as the "American Moses" more frequently than he was compared to Cincinnatus, the dictator of the Roman Empire that turned farmer.<sup>9</sup> Again, these details serve to demonstrate the proliferation of Old Testament knowledge and reliance on this knowledge that permeated all areas of understanding during the Revolutionary period. This serves to aid in understanding the political discourse revolving around Hebrew scripture.

The Boston Massacre was a pivotal moment as hostilities between the colonies and Britain grew. John Adams was a lawyer during the trial of the British soldiers involved in the massacre. It was during the sentencing of this trial that an appeal was made by both the defense and prosecution to foundational law rooted in Hebrew scripture. Justice Edmond Trowbridge said to the jury that throughout the last year they had "...heard much of the law

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel Driesbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*, 88; see also Driesbach's note referring to Robert P Hay, "George Washington: American Moses," *American Quarterly* (21, no 4 (1969): 780-791); Garry Willis, *Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 27-37; Richard V. Pierard and Robert D. Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie, 1988), 81-85.

given to the Jews, respecting homicide, as well as of the precept given to Noah, that ‘Whoso shedeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.’”<sup>10</sup> Trowbridge’s statement reflected a common position of those in the eighteenth-century who refer to the law of the Jews. Even within his statement, Trowbridge quoted from Genesis 9:6.

On the other side was the argument of Justice Peter Oliver who maintained that Trowbridge’s use of the law found in Genesis and given to Noah was “...urged...very indiscriminately, without any of the softening’s of humanity.”<sup>11</sup> Oliver acknowledged Trowbridge’s argument from Genesis. But Oliver countered that “Moses in his code of laws,” also recognized death as a penalty. As Moses was the “...best commentator on his own laws,” he had also implemented restrictions of the death penalty.<sup>12</sup> Oliver maintained that a more nuanced understanding of the Hebrew law needed to be considered. He pointed out that the law of Moses said that if someone “...thrust another of hatred that he must die,” but that “...if he thrust him suddenly without enmity...in those cases there were cities of refuge appointed for the manslayer to flee to, that his life might be safe.”<sup>13</sup> To the point of Oliver, the law of Moses describes what murder is and what the punishment should be in various locations including Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. One central passage about the cities of refuge is located in Numbers 35.

Justice Oliver went on to state that “...to construe that law of Noah strictly, is only to gratify a blood thirsty revenge, without any of those allowances for human frailties which the

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<sup>10</sup> Justice Edmond Trowbridge, “Trowbridge’s and Oliver’s Charges to the Jury: 5 December 1770.” *The Adams Papers, Legal Papers of John Adams*. Vol 3, Cases 63 and 64: The Boston Massacre Trials.

<sup>11</sup> Justice Peter Oliver, “Trowbridge’s and Oliver’s Charges to the Jury: 5 December 1770.” *The Adams Papers, Legal Papers of John Adams*. Vol 3, Cases 63 and 64: The Boston Massacre Trials.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

law of nature and the English law also make.”<sup>14</sup> While Oliver appealed to the law of nature, the English law, and the law of the land, in the sentencing trial from the Boston massacre, Oliver also relied on reasoning from Hebrew scripture. Thus, even looking to the courts during the Revolution was to not look to Blackstone alone but to look to Moses. These justices knew law and the theory of law well. Yet their arguments demonstrate that they were not only concerned with legal code that was removed from Old Testament ideas. No, much of their appeal to scripture reads more closely to a theological debate over proper interpretation of a religious text, not an argument in a court of law.

While the use of the law of Moses was common, a debate over how the law of Moses should be interpreted was also not abnormal. The justices on both sides of the case of the Boston Massacre made use of the law of Moses, also known as the Torah. The decalogue, or the Ten Commandments, is the most straight forward and significant of the code of laws which is found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Driesbach says that early Puritans and Pilgrims framed their legal codes with a copy of the Decalogue.<sup>15</sup> As a debate among historians over whether New England’s laws were primarily found in scripture or English law, Driesbach agreed with Daniel Boorstin who said the debate is beside the point. Boorstin wrote that “...for early New Englanders,” English law and Mosaic “...turned out to be pretty much the same.”<sup>16</sup> While

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Driesbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience*, 28; see also Driesbach, *Reading the Bible*, note 110, Driesbach recognized that Boorstin noted “that the New England Puritans made some revisions to English law that aligned colonial laws more closely with Mosaic law. “The most dramatic and most obvious [changes the Puritans made to English law] were in the list of capital crimes. To those crimes punishable by death under the laws of England, the colonists by 1648 had added a number of others, including idolatry (violations of the First Commandment), blasphemy, man-stealing (from Exod. 21.16), adultery with a married woman, perjury with intent to secure the death of another, the cursing of a parent by a child over 16 years of age (Exod. 21.17), the offense of being a ‘rebellious son’ (Deut. 21.20.21), and the third offense of burglary or highway robbery. These were clear cases where the laws of Scripture were allowed to override the laws of England.””

New England has been more widely recognized for their religious ambition, it is important to be reminded that those who settled Virginia were also pious. It is obvious that early settlers in Virginia implemented the Mosaic law into the “Articles, Lawes, and Orders, Divine, Politique, and Martiall for the Colony in Virginea” (1610-1611).<sup>17</sup> The Virginia laws were clear in their not allowing speech that was “impiously or maliciously, against the holy and blessed Trinitie, or any of the three persons, that is to say, against God the Father, God the Son, and God the holy Ghost, or against the knowne Articles of the Christian faith,” which included blasphemy, defying God’s word, breaking the sabbath, murder, lying, or committing adultery.<sup>18</sup> Surely there is more nuanced positions that deal with understanding the role of scripture and law and how those positions played out over history. However, in its most basic form, these laws point out their historic tie to Hebrew scripture which provides further insight into why political Hebraism was significant during the founding period of the United States.

Connecting the theory of law into the conversation about political theory in the eighteenth-century is important. As already seen in the trial of the soldiers involved in the Boston Massacre, the laws of the land were intrinsically connected with the laws of Moses. Jurists in Boston did not make those connections for the first time. They were historical actors in a court that established and executed the laws of the land, laws that were initially implemented during the founding of the colonies, and, as such, laws that were also intimately connected to the law of Moses. It is no wonder that the clergy advocated for government to

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<sup>17</sup> “Articles, Lawes, and Orders, Divine, Politique, and Martiall for the Colony in Virginea” (1610-1611), in Donald Lutz, *Colonial Origins of the American Constitution*, 315-318.

<sup>18</sup> “Articles, Lawes, and Orders, Divine, Politique, and Martiall for the Colony in Virginea” (1610-1611), in Donald Lutz, *Colonial Origins of the American Constitution*, 315-318; for scholarly comments on this particular Virginia law and its use see also Daniel Driesbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*, 44.

“...decree justice...and not only decree, but also execute the same.<sup>19</sup> Clergy wanted a just system and wanted those in the community to “...protect equally against civil and spiritual tyranny.”<sup>20</sup>

When considering the historical connection of colonial law to the Torah and the clergy’s encouragement for just government to be executed within a moral society, it is no wonder that Patrick Henry asked Thomas Jefferson, “Do you remember any instance where tyranny was destroyed and freedom established on its ruins, among a people possessing so small a share of virtue and public spirit?”<sup>21</sup> It sets the stage to comprehend why Adams wrote to Benjamin Rush and said, “...without national morality a republican government cannot be maintained.”<sup>22</sup> These leaders viewed their circumstances in a parallel with Israel because their legal system, their education system, and their basis for morality all centered on the Bible and an intimate knowledge of the Old Testament in particular.

John Adams was instrumental in the lead up to and during the Revolution. He served as a lawyer for the soldiers involved in the Boston Massacre and was well respected for his legal expertise. While it was already evident that Adams had reflected on a sermon that paralleled America and Israel in May of 1776, it was in March of that year that he wrote to John Penn after being asked to draft a state constitution. In the letter, Adams wrote, “If I was possess’d of abilities equal to the great task...to sketch out the outlines of a constitution for a colony, I should think myself the happiest of men in complying.”<sup>23</sup> Adams’s glee at the chance to be

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<sup>19</sup> Samuel Phillips, *Political Rulers Authoriz’d*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> James Dana, *A Sermon Preached*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Patrick Henry, *Life Correspondence and Speeches Vol II*, 49.

<sup>22</sup> John Adams, “From John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 2 February 1807.”

<sup>23</sup> John Adams, “John Adams to John Penn, 27 March 1776.” *The Adams Papers, Papers of John Adams*. Vol 4. February-August 1776.

involved in such a task could hardly be contained. He possessed good reason for his elation. Adams's view was that "...politics is the art of securing human happiness, and the prosperity of societies depends upon the constitution of government, under which they live; there cannot be a more agreeable employment to a benevolent mind than the study of the best, kinds of government."<sup>24</sup>

Armed with such a noble cause, Adams set out to complete the task at hand. However, would Adams dive straight into establishing law based on the Torah, like some historians argue the earliest settlers did, or would he turn to English law theory and men like Blackstone? At this point in his life, Adams had already settled on what he felt was the best form of government and provided telling insight to his position. In 1776, an apex in American history, Adams was clear in his thoughts:

"A man must be indifferent to sneer and ridicule, in some companies to mention the names of Sidney, Harrington, Lock, Milton, Nedham, Neville, Burnet, Hoadley; for the lines of John Milton on one of his sonnets, will bear an application, even in this country, upon some occasions.

"I did but teach the age, to quite their clogs,  
By the plain rules of ancient liberty,  
When lo! A barbarous noise surrounded me  
Of Owls and Cuckoo's, Asses, Apes and Dogs."

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<sup>24</sup> John Adams, "John Adams to John Penn, 27 March 1776." *The Adams Papers, Papers of John Adams*. Vol 4. February-August 1776.

These great writers however, will convince any man who has the fortitude to read them, that all good government is republican: that the only valuable part of the British Constitution is so; for the true idea of a Republic, is 'an empire of laws and not of men': and therefore as a republic is the best of governments so, that particular combination of power, which is best contrived for a faithful execution of the laws, is the best of republics."<sup>25</sup>

With that, Adams laid a clear understanding not only of the best form of government, but also of his source material in convincing him of such a position. It is not surprising that historians like Bernard Bailyn, Forrest McDonald, Robert Shalhope, J. G. A. Pocock, Gordon Wood, and Donald Lutz investigated the ideas that influenced the founders like Adams when Adams wrote of republicanism and listed influences in that direct manner. In this scholarship much of the focus has been toward republicanism and the enlightenment's influence on the American founders. The scholarship of those intellectuals like Bailyn is important, however, it has overlooked or undervalued the role of Hebrew scriptures. While a focus on influences of Sidney, Harrington, and Locke have proven useful, political Hebraism has proven the need to expand our ideological understanding.

Scholars of political Hebraism have begun to fill the gaps left in the wake of the republicanism debate in American history. Although Hebraic scholarship does not take from Bailyn, Shalhope, Pocock, Lutz, and so forth, it expands upon their thoughts and adds a clearer understanding into the roots of the republicanism debate. This is true because Hebraic

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<sup>25</sup> John Adams, "John Adams to John Penn, 27 March 1776." *The Adams Papers, Papers of John Adams*. Vol 4. February-August 1776.

scholarship does not state that these American patriots were influenced by Jewish roots and not those like Harrington, Sidney, and Locke. Political Hebraism demonstrates the reality that men like Adams were uniquely influenced by Hebrew scripture, but it can also establish that those on Adams' list, like Sidney, were inspired by Hebrew scriptures.<sup>26</sup>

Algernon Sidney was a giant in his own right and a man who many, like Adams, read and quoted in political theory. While it is correct to recognize Sidney as an influence, it is also accurate to understand that Sidney and those American patriots all had a common source to which they turned. In Sidney's book *Discourses Concerning Government*, he discussed the very political topics and interpretations that American political leaders and clergymen would take up over a century later. Sidney argued that, "There was no shadow of a paternal kingdom amongst the Hebrews."<sup>27</sup> He went as far as to label the Hebrew patriarchs in Genesis as kings as he rhetorically wrote, "Why was not Jacob's monarchy conferred upon his right heir? How come

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<sup>26</sup> For Hebraic scholarship on people and ideas that relate to American history but do not necessarily directly explore Hebraic influence on American history see Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament As a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War*, and "'A Perfect Republic': The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788," *The New England Quarterly* (Vol 82, No 2 (June 2009)) 235-263, "'Written in the Style of Antiquity': Pseudo-Biblicism and the Early American Republic, 1770-1830," *Church History* (Vol 79, No 4 (December 2010)) 800-826; Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Michael Walzer, Lorberbaum Menachem, Zohar Noam, and Yair Loberbaum, *The Jewish Political Tradition: Volume 1: Authority*, (Yale University Press, 2000); Ronald Beiner, "James Harrington on the Hebrew Commonwealth," *The Review of Politics* (Vol 76, No 2 (Spring 2014)) 169-193; Miriam Bodian, "Biblical Hebrews and the Rhetoric of Republicanism: Seventeenth-Century Portuguese Jews on the Jewish Community," *AJS Review* (Vol 22, No 2 (1997)) 199-221; Yechiel Leiter, "The Hebraic Roots of John Locke's Doctrine of Charity," *Jewish Political Studies Review*, (Jerusalem Vol 20, Iss ¾ (Fall 2008)) 141-159; Eric Nelson, "Hebraism and the Republican Turn of 1776: A contemporary Account of the Debate Over Common Sense," *The William and Mary Quarterly* (Vol 70, No 4 (October 2013)) 781-812, and "'Talmudical Commonwealths' and the Rise of Republican Exclusivism," *The Historical Journal* (Vol 50, No 4 (December 2007)) 809-835; Fania Oz-Salzberger, "The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism," *Hebraic Political Studies* (Vol 1, No 5 (Fall 2006)) 586-592; Nathan R. Perl-Rosenthal, "The 'Divine Right of Republics': Hebraic Republicanism and the Debate over Kingless Government in Revolutionary America," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, (Third Series, Vol 66, No 3 (July 2009)) 535-263

<sup>27</sup> Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government*, 42.

people neglect a point of such importance?”<sup>28</sup> Sidney made an argument from Old Testament text that a hereditary succession in monarchy was foolish and wrong and, even among the early Jews, was not practiced. Something he points out that if it should have been established from the Hebrew patriarchs, “...why did not Moses put them in mind of it? Why did not Jacob declare to whom it did belong?”<sup>29</sup>

Sidney did not stop at hereditary monarchy. As his argument progressed, Sidney continued his use of Hebrew text along with the works of other authors who had also reasoned from such writings. Sidney used a Josephus quotation to say that the first sin of Saul, the first Jewish king, was “...that he took away the aristocracy.”<sup>30</sup> He also turned to the interpretation of Philo who reasoned that the “...kingly government, as it was in Israel,” was a result of the “sinful people.”<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Sidney turned to Moses Maimonides to further his argument against monarchy. Sidney wrote that the Jewish monarchy was “...in practice and principle contrary to that which God had instituted.” He continued that “Maimonides frequently says the same thing, grounded upon the words of Hosea, ‘I gave them ‘kings in my wrath;’ and whosoever will call that a divine institution, may give the same name to plagues or famines, ...I may safely say, the Hebrew kings were not instituted by God, but given as a punishment of their sin.”<sup>32</sup> Sidney, the men he quoted, and the American patriots are all turned to Hebrew scripture in order to understand the best form of government structure. To be sure, they did not use Hebrew text alone, for they looked to other ancients like the Greeks along with the

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government*, 42.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

thoughts of other political theorists. Yet the point is that the pervasive use of Hebrew text has been overlooked and underexplored in its contribution to political theory. It is important to understand not only that Hebrew scripture was influential but also that all of these individuals turned to the same portions of scripture for their knowledge.

One major point in Sidney's argument of civic structure was that monarchy was not instituted by God. He moved beyond that point to dialogue with his own question of "...whether one form of government is prescribed to us by God and nature, or are we left according to our own understanding, to constitute such as seem best to ourselves."<sup>33</sup> Sidney then moves beyond his rhetorical question and demonstrates more objectively how he understands the answer to his own question of government structure. He wrote, "This at least is certain, that the government of the Hebrews instituted by God, had a judge, the great Sanhedrin, and general assemblies of the people."<sup>34</sup> Even though Sidney used more sources, he still took time to build a strong argument from Hebrew scripture to support the idea that only one form of government was instituted by God. He used Hebrew scripture to prove his historical observation that no good government had existed in the world "...that did not consist of the three simple species of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy."<sup>35</sup>

Beyond Sidney's historical observation of government and scriptural interpretation that a government is made of three parts, he made another interesting observation. Sidney stated that he did not know if the Spartans descended from the Jews, "...but their kings were under a

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<sup>33</sup> Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government*, 230.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

regulation much like that of..." Deuteronomy 17.<sup>36</sup> After that comment, he continued to compare how other successful ancient governments operated in a similar fashion to the Jews. This shows that the Hebrews and their ancient scriptures were a cornerstone of political theory in England in the seventeenth-century. Sidney's writing demonstrated great respect for what the Old Testament says about political structure. It is the tool used to compare and contrast with other great forms of ancient civilizations' civic structure. Observing his comments, political conclusions, and Old Testament usage is important when gleaning what happened during the American Revolution.

Many American patriots and political theorist were familiar with Sidney during the eighteenth-century. Sidney was a known a popular Whig political theorist that was executed after his work *Discourses Concerning Government*. Observing positions of Sidney provides insight for understanding political reasoning from founders who would also be influenced by his work. If Sidney displayed a use of Hebrew scripture to defend his political positions, it potentially serves to deepen the influence of political Hebraism in the American founding. John Adams, in his lengthy work, *A Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, quoted Sidney directly when he wrote, "This at least is certain, that the government of the Hebrews, instituted by God, had a judge, the great Sanhedrin, and general assemblies of the people."<sup>37</sup> Such a quotation solidifies Adams's earlier comments that Sidney was among those who, "...will convince any man who has the fortitude to read [him], that all good

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 417.

<sup>37</sup> John Adams, *A Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, 147.

government is republican.”<sup>38</sup> As Sidney and Adams used the same words to describe the reality of the Jewish civic state, they resemble remarkably the men of the pulpit in eighteenth-century America. A friend of Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Cooper said that the Hebrew government was, “The form of government originally established...by a charter from heaven, ... a free republic” that also “...consisted of three parts; a chief magistrate...a council of seventy...and the general assembly of the people.”<sup>39</sup> Not long after Cooper made his remarks, he said that the Jewish government was, “...according to a great author, who wrote conclusively, who fought bravely, and died gloriously in the cause of liberty,” “...democratically sent” and “...democratically received.”<sup>40</sup> To be clear, the author to which Cooper referred was Algernon Sidney. Sections of the Torah which proved most important to political theorists like Sidney and Adams were how God provided Moses with the law in Exodus and then Deuteronomy chapters 16 and 17 which provided instruction for the Hebrews to select judges and officers and instructions for a king (much of this all depends on how one interprets these chapters for how they understand the role of King).<sup>41</sup>

Another popular book that made its way around the colonies around the time of the American Revolution was Lord Sommers’ book titled *The Judgment of Whole Kingdoms and Nations, Concerning the Rights, Power, and Prerogative of Kings, and the Rights, Privileges, and*

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<sup>38</sup> John Adams, “John Adams to John Penn, 27 March 1776.” *The Adams Papers, Papers of John Adams*. Vol 4. February-August 1776.

<sup>39</sup> Samuel Cooper, *A Sermon Preached Before His Excellency John Hancock, Esq; Governour, He Honourable the Senate, and the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, October 25, 1780*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Samuel Cooper, *A Sermon Preached Before His Excellency John Hancock, Esq; Governour, He Honourable the Senate, and the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, October 25, 1780*, 8.

<sup>41</sup> For scholarship on Algernon Sidney see Michael P. Winship, “Algernon Sidney’s Calvinist Republicanism,” *Journal of British Studies* (Vol 49, no 4 (October 2010)) 753-773; While Winship views Sidney as a Calvinist Republican it should be recognized that nuanced definition should not interfere with observing Sidney’s use of Old Testament reasoning for his political purposes.

*Properties of the People*. This book was reprinted in the colonies in the 1770's. Part of its stated purpose was to show "...the nature of government in general, both from God and man," and the civic structure "...ordained over the children of Israel."<sup>42</sup> Sommers' book continues to demonstrate the focus of those in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century on understanding the Hebrew political structure as expressed in Old Testament scripture. Sommers, Adams, Sidney, and others continue to demonstrate a trend that was also evident among the clergy of the eighteenth-century; namely, they turned to the Torah, Judges, and Samuel as primary locations to gather information, all the while often not providing reference to their citations, again implying their belief that their audience was familiar with the appropriate references.

Like Sidney before, Sommers attacked hereditary monarchy before moving on to advocate more directly for a form of republic. Sommers indicated that Deuteronomy 16 and 17 were imperative in understanding the directive that "...magistrates and governors" were to proceed from the people and that Israel was to "...make judges and officers throughout their tribes."<sup>43</sup> In his argument, Sommers was stating that Israel had flexibility in how they structured their political system, replacing the republic with a monarch was an example of that option, but it was the "...free will" of Israel implement what they saw fit. An example Sommers used in describing this flexibility in Israel was when "David was set up by the appointment of God...eleven tribes followed Ishbosheth...though David" did not "...call them rebels," implying that David understood the democratic nature of the tribes of Israel.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Lord Sommers, *The Judgment of Whole Kingdoms and Nations, Concerning the Rights, Power, and Prerogative of Kings, and the Rights, Privileges, and Properties of the People*, vii.

<sup>43</sup> Lord Sommers, *The Judgment of Whole Kingdoms and Nations, Concerning the Rights, Power, and Prerogative of Kings, and the Rights, Privileges, and Properties of the People*, 86.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

Political theorist like Sidney, Sommers, and Adams, along with clergy, all attempted to understand the form of government that God originally gave to Israel, and how that was best understood once Israel chose to transform to a monarchy in 1 Samuel 8. While there may have been different interpretations of how to understand and implement that knowledge from the Hebrews, they turned to that text nonetheless. It is this reality of political Hebraism that has been overlooked or underappreciated in the American Revolution and formation of the United States constitution.

Eighteenth-century culture in America was dominated by biblical rhetoric and knowledge. Bible passages were used in colonial reading books, states' purpose of education in early settlements was to allow people to read the Bible and understand law, and this foundation of early American colonies continued to manifest itself in the culture of the American Revolution. While answering the question of whether the United States was founded as a Christian nation or not can be a combative topic for some, there is no doubt of the influence of the Bible and Christianity on the American culture on the eve of the Revolution. Patrick Henry, in his famous speech where he cried, "...give me liberty or give me death," also said, "The millions of people, armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us."<sup>45</sup> In his speech, Henry included both direct quotations and used indirect references to many portions of scripture that demonstrate his familiarity with the Old Testament. These references include Jeremiah 5:21,

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<sup>45</sup> Patrick Henry, "Liberty or Death Speech," *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry*, 120-123.

Ezekiel 12:2, Ecclesiastes 9:11, 1 Samuel 8:20, Chronicles 32:8, Deuteronomy 3:12, and Isaiah 45:21. With such references, it is no wonder that Daniel Driesbach described the speech as “reverberating with revivalist fervor” and that it reads “like a lay sermon.”<sup>46</sup> Charles Cohen said it showed an “adept use of the Bible” and echoed Driesbach’s comment that it read like a lay sermon.<sup>47</sup>

Henry’s speech served a political end and possessed a distinctive Old Testament means to achieve that goal. Henry demonstrated that he was well aware of Hebrew scripture and that he was adept at using its rhetoric to appeal to his countrymen as a way of effective communication. Like many before, his methods serve to demonstrate the familiarity of most with Old Testament text and its pervasiveness in the culture at his readiness to utilize its form to communicate a political point to his audience.

Many in the eighteenth-century were interested in what the Old Testament articulated about civic structure. Preachers, political theorists, and the general population seemed to want to know how the Hebrews government operated and how to best interpret the role of a monarch. While some scholars recognize the height of political Hebraism, the act of using the Old Testament as a political text, much earlier than the eighteenth-century, others like Eran Shalev pull research together and demonstrate that political Hebraism was alive and well during the American Revolution.<sup>48</sup> The interest in understanding the Hebrew civic structure is also witnessed in the book by Moses Lowman, *A Dissertation on the Civil Government of the*

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<sup>46</sup> Daniel Driesbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*, 80.

<sup>47</sup> Charles Cohen, *The Liberty Or Death Speech*, 706.

<sup>48</sup> Eran Shalev, ““A Perfect Republic”: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788,”

*Hebrews: In Which the True Designs, and Nature of Their Government are Explained. The Justice, Wisdom and Goodness of the Mosaical Constitutions, are Vindicated: in Particular, from Some Late, Unfair and False Representations of Them in the Moral Philosopher.*

While Lowman lived, ministered, and wrote in England, his book was printed in 1745 and found a home in American colonies. Lowman's book on the civil government of the Hebrews is contained on a book list from William Strahan to Benjamin Franklin in 1752 to be put into the collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia. While it is worth noting that this book made its way to Philadelphia and was available to the Philadelphia audience for consumption, it does not indicate if it was used or merely sat unattended in the book collection. Details that indicate Lowman's work was read and of some value are that Lowman was referenced by others and his work was in multiple libraries. His work on Hebrew government was in the libraries of Williams College, Yale College, Brown University, the private library of Reverend John B. Romeyn of New York, and the Charleston Library. Again, because this book was in these libraries does not in and of itself indicate how influential Lowman was in the colonies. However, the presence of his research on Hebrew government in multiple libraries which include college libraries, at least demonstrates the topic of Lowman's research was valuable to readers. This concept is further supported when the greater context of the eighteenth-century is weighed. People read and quoted their Bibles and knew their Old Testaments well, clergy preached from the Old Testament and referenced government

structure, and even political figures desired to articulate their positions based on Hebrew scripture.<sup>49</sup> Lowman's work complements these realities of the culture perfectly.

John Livingston, a clergyman from New York, called Lowman a "learned man" in a sermon he delivered in 1804 which further demonstrates that Lowman possessed a respect of learned individuals for over a half century. In 1851, James Mathews printed a collection of his lectures that dealt with biblical texts and government, *The Bible and Civil Government: In a Course of Lectures*. In Mathews' introduction he mentioned several people and works that were instrumental in his research and ability to compile and organize his lectures. Mathews wrote he was "indebted" to John Adams for his *Defense of the American Constitution*, which is not out of place, however, most significantly was his mention of Moses Lowman for his work *On the Hebrew Government*.<sup>50</sup> Mathews' book demonstrates that the inquiry of Americans to desire to best understand how civil government and scripture work together was something

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<sup>49</sup> For political sermons preached from the Old Testament, many election day sermons can be referenced, see Abiel Abbot, *Traits of Resemblance in the People of the United States of America to Ancient Israel*; Samuel Cooper, *A Sermon Preached Before His Excellency John Hancock, Esq; Governour, He Honourable the Senate, and the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, October 25, 1780*; James Dana, *A Sermon Preached Before the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, at Hartford, on the Day of the Anniversary Election, May 13, 1779*; Benjamin Hichborn, *An Oration, Delivered March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1777, at the Request of the inhabitants of the Town of Boston; To Commemorate the Bloody Tragedy of the Fifth of March, 1770*; Joseph Huntington, . *A Discourse, Adapted to the Present Day, on the Health and Happiness, or Misery and Ruin, of the Body Politic, in Similitude to that of the Natural Body*; Samuel Langdon, *The Republic of the Israelites An Example to the American States, and Government Corrupted by Vice, and Recovered by Righteousness*; see also Ellis Sandoz, *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era: 1730-1805*; Donald Lutz, *Colonial Origins of the American Constitution: A Documentary History*; for information on use of scripture by political figures and general population see James Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution*; Daniel Dreisbach and Mark David Hall, *Faith and the Founders Of the American Republic*; Daniel Dreisbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*; Paul Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880*; Spencer McBride, *Pulpit and Nation: Clergymen and the Politics of Revolutionary America*; Mark Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492-1783*; Harry Stout, *New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England*; Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment*; and Donald Lutz, . "The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought." *The American Political Science Review*.

<sup>50</sup> James McFarlane Mathews, *The Bible and Civil Government: In a Course of Lectures*, 8.

that lasted well beyond the establishment of the American constitution. Not only were the first colonial settlements established with a desire to teach others to read for the purpose of allowing citizens to read the Bible and local laws, but American revolutionaries were also entrenched in the same foundation of turning to scripture to reason in politics, and that trend continued in turn well past the Revolution.

Statesmen like Adams and Henry engaged in rhetoric that was fueled by Old Testament scripture. Others could have been influenced by works from men such as Lowman and his academic study of Hebrew government. But was there also an understanding of politics informed by the Old Testament from other politically minded folks?

David Ramsay lived during the American Revolution and wrote a historical account titled *The History of the American Revolution*. As Ramsay wrote of the events that led up to the hostilities of the revolution, he recalled that many writers advocated for the advantages of independence. According to Ramsay, the pamphlet of *Common Sense*, by Thomas Paine, "...held the most distinguished rank."<sup>51</sup> *Common Sense* received much attention in the eighteenth-century and has continued to receive notice from scholars, most recently by Hebraic scholars attempting to glean how Paine was influenced by political Hebraism.<sup>52</sup> Comments made by Ramsay about Paine's work and methods are extraordinary to consider after realizing the general population, clergy, and political theorists all sought to understand what Hebrew scripture had to say about political structure. No short quotation can do justice to Ramsay's statement: "The stile, manner, and language of this performance were calculated to interest

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<sup>51</sup> David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution: In Two Volumes*, 315.

<sup>52</sup> See Eric Nelson, "Hebraism and the Republican Turn of 1776: A contemporary Account of the Debate Over *Common Sense*," in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, (Vol 70, No 4 (October 2013)) 781-812.

the passions, and to rouse all the active powers of human nature. With the view of operating on the sentiments of a religious people, scripture was pressed into his service, and the powers, and even the name of a king was rendered odious in the eyes of the numerous colonists who had read and studied the history of the Jews, as recorded in the Old Testament. The folly of that people in revolting from a government, instituted by Heaven itself, and the oppressions to which they were subjected in consequence of their lusting after kings to rule over them, afforded an excellent handle for prepossessing the colonists in favour of republican institutions, and prejudicing them against kingly government. Hereditary succession was turned into ridicule.”<sup>53</sup>

With this language, it is apparent that Ramsay understood that the audience of Paine was religious, that they knew their Old Testaments well, that they had read and studied the history of the Jews, and that they had determined that Hebrew scripture taught that a republic was instituted by God whereas monarchy resulted from sin. Information contained in Ramsay’s writing only serves to prove political Hebraism was of utmost importance to a wide group of people around the time of the American Revolution. Not only that, but he also indicates that the story of the Jews’ history in Exodus and the 1 Samuel 8 was paramount, a point that supports conclusions from chapter three. If Paine’s pamphlet was so effective, what portions of Hebrew scripture did he use and how did he use them?

A few examples of *Common Sense* will illustrate the point of Ramsay. This will also demonstrate that the ideological origins of the United States was not based on classical republicanism alone, or on European enlightenment alone, but included a republican

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<sup>53</sup> David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution: In Two Volumes*, 315.

understanding of the Hebrew text. Yet while political Hebraism is an important element of America's ideological foundation, in and of itself it also fails to explain why it was influential in the eighteenth-century. Ultimately political Hebraism was valued during the Revolution because a Judeo-Christian ethos was instrumental in many aspects of life from the time of the initial colonial settlements. That ethos was not left behind during the eighteenth-century. It was embraced, and the fact that it was well and active is an important aspect to understanding why Hebrew texts were instrumentally used as political documents. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* stands as an example to the fact that these things are true.<sup>54</sup>

"Government by kings," wrote Paine, "was first introduced into the world by heathens, from whom the children of Israel copied the custom."<sup>55</sup> Verbiage used by Paine is indicative of the Judeo-Christian influence in the culture. For this reason, Paine employs the word "heathens." After all, this implies that any outside of the people who belonged to the God of the Hebrews was a heathen and that anyone connected with the God of the Jews was not. It also shows that a common sense interpretation of 1 Samuel 8 and Deuteronomy 17 would be

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<sup>54</sup> See Eric Nelson, "Hebraism and the Republican Turn of 1776: A contemporary Account of the Debate Over Common Sense." *The William and Mary Quarterly* (Vol 70, No 4, October 2013) 781-812; Nelson includes information about the debate that was created by how Paine used the Bible for his arguments, see page 782. For the purpose of political Hebraism, the particular interpretation of scripture used is much less important than recognizing Old Testament passages were used with a political aim. Nelson also points out that Paine had contemporaries that recognized his scriptural arguments were not new, for this see Peter Whitney, *American Independence Vindicated: A Sermon Delivered September 12, 1776 at a Lecture Appointed for Publishing the Declaration of Independence, Passed July 4, 1776 by the representatives of the United States of America in General Congress Assembled* (Boston, 1777) 47, 45; Sir Brooke Boothby, *Observations on the Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs, and on Mr. Paine's Rights of Man: In Two Parts* (London, 1792), 99; For Paine's use of Israelite example in his polemical writings, see also David Wootton, "Introduction: The Republican Tradition: From Commonwealth to Common Sense," *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649-1776*, ed Wootton (Stanford, California, 1994), 26-41; Winthrop D. Jordan, "Familial Politics: Thomas Paine and the Killing of the King, 1776," *Journals of American History*, (60, no 2 (September 1973)) 294-308; Stephen Newman, "A Note on *Common Sense* and Christian Eschatology," *Political Theory* (6, no 1 (February 1978)) 101-108.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 11.

that it was rebellion of the Jews that lead to a monarchy in their nation. Paine says that the Hebrew form of government “...was a kind of Republic administered by a judge and the elders of the tribes” and that “...it was sinful to acknowledge” a king other than God.<sup>56</sup>

According to Paine, “No man was a warmer wisher” than himself for reconciliation with Britain until the “...the fatal nineteenth of April 1775,” which was a reference to the hostilities between Americans and British as the British soldiers marched on Lexington and Concord. With those events, Paine said he “...rejected the hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh of England forever.”<sup>57</sup> Here Paine used the language of a hard-hearted pharaoh found in Exodus and crafted its use to parallel the story of the Hebrews with America. However, the fact that Paine used this, like many clergy and other leaders, does not necessarily indicate that he believed it to be true. But even if he did not believe it to be true, it does not take away from recognizing the importance of his using that vocabulary. If anything, it supports how engrained the use of the Old Testament was in colonial America. After all, if Paine did not believe in the truth of scripture, he must have recognized that the volume of his audience did and that it was the best way to communicate and prove a political point. No matter his personal beliefs, he used Hebrew scripture as a means to achieve a political end.

Outside of Paine’s<sup>58</sup> use of Exodus to compare King George to Pharaoh, he also relied heavily on scripture from Judges, the story of Gideon, and from 1 Samuel 8 when the people of Israel made their request to Samuel for a king to rule over them. Not only did *Common Sense* pull from several areas of the Old Testament, but Paine also appealed to Protestants in the

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 27.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 12-16.

colonies when he wrote that “...withholding scripture from the public” happened in “Popish countries” and that “monarchy in every instance is the Popery of government.”<sup>59</sup> Paine’s rhetoric was clear and unapologetic in its appeal to an audience of a Judeo-Christian worldview. He paralleled America and Israel and reasoned from Hebrew text to prove political positions.

Political Hebraism was influential during the American revolution due to the reality that a Judeo-Christian ethos was pervasive among the population. As established in chapter one, political Hebraism can have varying definitions, but, in its most basic form, it merely indicates the use of Hebrew scripture as a political document.<sup>60</sup>

Some scholars dive deeper into particulars of political theory and differences in how these positions interpreted Hebrew scripture. A prime example of this was pointed out in Eric Nelson’s article, “Hebraism and the Republican Turn of 1776: A Contemporary Account of the Debate Over Common Sense.” Nelson points to distinctions in Hebraic interpretation by use of a conversation between John Adams and Thomas Paine. Adams wrote about his conversation with Paine about *Common Sense* where he told him “...that his reasoning from the Old Testament was ridiculous, and I could hardly think him sincere. At this he laughed and said he had taken his ideas in the part from John Milton: and then expressed a contempt of the Old Testament and indeed of the Bible at large, which surprised me.”<sup>61</sup> The conversation between Adams and Paine further demonstrates that, at its basic definition, political Hebraism was

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>60</sup> Kalman Neuman, “Political Hebraism and the Early Modern ‘Respublica Hebraeorum’: On Defining the Field.” *Hebraic Political Studies*, 59; see also, Eran Shalev, “A Perfect Republic: The Mosaic Constitution in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1788,” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol 82, No 2 (June 2009), 235-263.

<sup>61</sup> Eric Nelson, “Hebraism and the Republican Turn of 1776: A contemporary Account of the Debate Over Common Sense.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 784; for Adams quote see *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, ed L. H. Butterfield (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961) 3:333.

central to political conversation around the revolution, as was the use of Christian rhetoric. It also establishes that Adams and Paine, along with others, were familiar with Old Testament text and with previous theorists like Sidney and Milton. Not only is it important to keep those like Sidney and Milton as part of the collective that influenced thoughts of the founders, but it should not be forgotten that those political theorists also reasoned from the Hebrew scriptures.

Reflecting on the words of David Ramsay, works of John Adams, letters and speeches of famous patriots, and arguments of Thomas Paine, it is clear that political revolutionaries were familiar with Hebrew scripture and that they reasoned from it in similar ways to clergy and past political theorists. As patriots supported their cause for liberty and the establishment of a republic, they did so on a basis of their interpretation of the Torah, Judges, and 1 Samuel 8. It is also clear that interpretations contained nuanced differences, but it is telling to realize the intimacy with which these people knew and relied on the Old Testament to achieve their political purposes. Too much of modern scholarship has treated the American Revolution as though there was a bifurcation between religion and politics. To view those circumstances with a bifurcated lens would be too close to an anachronism of current culture. Instead, scholarship should continue to recognize the importance of political Hebraism in the American founding but also seek to provide a basis for others to understand why Hebraism was significant in the eighteenth-century. In order to achieve that end, scholars need to make concentrated effort to communicate elements of the eighteenth-century ethos, which validate the importance of political Hebraism.

It is a controversial statement to say that the United States was founded as a Christian nation. And to be sure, reality is much more nuanced than such a statement implies. And there

is a need to articulate an answer to the question of influence on the American founding. Bailyn saw this need and was instrumental in creating dialogue over the important ideas that held sway in the founding. While the debate dealing with republicanism that followed Bailyn produced much fruit, in the end, it left a gap in scholarship. After some time, Hebraic scholarship began to fill the gap in ideological influence in the American founding that was left in the wake of the republicanism debate. Yet the investigation of ideological influence, while important, left something to be desired. Stating that the United States was founded as a Christian nation may be contentious and slightly oversimplified. But ideas that are distinctly Christian do provide a more rounded answer to ideological influence than European enlightenment alone. Recognizing that a biblical ethos permeated education, legal dialogue, and political rhetoric provides a better context for grasping ideological influence. Political Hebraism possessed a prominent role in political discourse precisely because of the Christian ideas that were pervasive at the time of the Revolution. Did American have a Christian founding? Such a question may be too vague. However, the United States founding was influenced by Christian ideas.

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