

The Bible & the American Revolution

An address to the American Museum Society of Houston Baptist University

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- I. **Introduction:** When the Congress assembled in Philadelphia in 1774, **John Adams** wrote Abigail about the motion to open the Congress with prayer and described the prayer Mr. Duche, the Episcopal clergyman, offered the first day. Following the readings for the day, Mr. Duche read Psalm 35. Adams wrote Abigail the assigned psalm for the day seemed providential, and he encouraged her to read the psalm with all her friends and relatives.¹ The entire psalm seemed to encourage the struggling colonists in their confrontation with England:

“Plead *my* cause, O LORD, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help. Draw out also the spear, and stop *the way* against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I *am* thy salvation. Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt. Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the LORD chase *them*. Let their way be dark and slippery: and let the angel of the LORD persecute them. For without cause have they hid for me their net *in* a pit, *which* without cause they have digged for my soul. Let destruction come upon him at unawares, and let his net that he hath hid catch himself: into that very destruction let him fall. And my soul shall be joyful in the LORD: it shall rejoice in his salvation ... Let not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me: *neither* let them wink with the eye that hate me without a cause. For they speak not peace: but they devise deceitful matters against *them* that are quiet in the land ... Let them be ashamed and brought to confusion together that rejoice at mine hurt: let them be clothed with shame and dishonor that magnify *themselves* against me. Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favour my righteous cause: yea, let them say continually, Let the LORD be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant. And my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness *and* of thy praise all the day long.”

The Americans of the Revolutionary period were generally a Bible-saturated people, as reflected in their speeches and writings.

I. Study of Literature of Period

Donald Lutz, political scientist, studied political literature from 1760-1805; excluded most political sermons from study:

- The Bible accounted for 1/3 of all citations, more than any European writer
- Deuteronomy most frequently cited book, followed by Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of the Laws*
- Deuteronomy is cited twice as often as John Locke

¹ Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, September 18, 1774, *Letters of John Adams, addressed to his wife* (ed. Charles Francis Adams). Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1841, Vol. 1, 23-24.

- St. Paul cited as frequently as Montesquieu or Blackstone, 2 most cited secular writers.
- 9% of references in these secular writings are to the Bible.

II. Patrick Henry’s clarion call

One month before the shots were fired at Lexington and Concord, Patrick Henry delivered his electrifying “Liberty or Death” speech in the Virginia Convention. His words were laced with Biblical imagery and references:

Sir, we are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. The millions of people, armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess (cf. Deut. 3:12) 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 (*Isaiah 45:21*, “*there is no God else beside me, a just God and a Saviour, there is none beside me*) who presides over the destinies of nations and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us (*II Chronicles 32:8*, “*With him is an arme of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to helpe us, and to fight our battels...*). The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone (*Ecclesiastes 9:11*, “*the race is not to the swift, nor the battell to the strong...*”); it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable – and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come. It is in vain, sir to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace – but there is no peace (*Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11*). The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears (cf. phraseology of *Acts 17:20*) the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle (*Matthew 20:6* – quoting the householder in the parable of the labourers)? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear (*Acts 20:24* – Paul going to Jerusalem: “none of these things move me, neither count I my life deare unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy...”) or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death. (*Joshua 24:15*, “Choose you this day whome you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose lande ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”)²

Henry didn’t leaf through his Bible to see what verses he could use in his remarks, but the phraseology and references came naturally to the fore, since he was saturated with biblical reading and truth, as were many of the generation of the Revolution.

III. Bibles in the Dunham Bible Museum collection with Revolutionary connections.

1. **William Whipple’s copy of the 1537 Matthew’s Bible, with his large signature at the end of the Old Testament.** Whipple was a signer of the Declaration of Independence from New Hampshire and a Brigadier General of the

² Daniel Dreisbach. *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*. Oxford University Press, 2017, 79-81.

New Hampshire Militia at the Battle of Saratoga. Above his signature, Whipple noted he had bought the Bible in 1753.

2. **First Book with Musical Notes in America, with psalms versed by Francis Hopkinson:** *Psalms of David, with the ten commandments, creed, Lord's prayer, &c.*, published in 1767, was designed "for the use of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of the City of New York" and is the earliest American book to contain extensive use of music printed from type.

The type for the music was obtained at considerable cost from a press in Amsterdam. The versification of the psalms was accomplished by **Francis Hopkinson** (1737-91), author, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and a songwriter generally credited with being the first native of America to have produced a musical composition.

After departing Congress at the end of 1776, Francis Hopkinson was treasurer of the Continental Loan Office and judge of the Admiralty Court of Pennsylvania. He helped Pennsylvania ratify the Constitution during its constitutional convention in 1787. George Washington later appointed him judge of the United States District Court for the District of Pennsylvania.

3. **Burkitt New Testament, such as in James Madison's family**

William Burkitt (1650-1703) was a vicar and lecturer in Dedham, England. In 1770, the father of **James Madison** (the "father of the Constitution" and fourth president of the United States) ordered a copy of Burkitt's *Expository Notes* for the family's library. James Madison was a student at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) at the time, but apparently studied the Bible when he was at home. His notes from Burkitt's Bible are among James Madison's papers in the Library of Congress.³ James Madison's mother had her portrait painted with this open Bible on a table at her side. The Dunham Bible Museum's copy of Burkitt's *Expository Notes* is a later 1794 edition published in New Haven, Connecticut.

4. **The Gun Wad Bible**

The earliest Bible in a European language printed in America was Martin Luther's German translation of the Scriptures. Christoph Saur (1663-1758), Germany, determining to print an edition of the German Bible, issued an appeal for subscriptions. H. Luther, a type-founder of Frankfurt-am-Main, supplied gratuitously a font of German-style black letter type.

In 1743, after three years, Saur completed the printing of the book. The edition consisted of 1200 copies, and the price was fixed at eighteen shillings. However, Saur generously gave a copy of these German Scriptures to anyone who could not afford a copy, saying for the poor "we have no price."

On Saur's death in 1758, he was succeeded by his only son, who bore the same name. Christoph Saur the younger (1721-1784) enlarged the business, and in 1763 he issued a second quarto edition of the Bible, printing 2000 copies. It was the first

³ "Notes on the Commentary on the Bible, 1770-1773," *Founders Online, National Archives*, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-01-02-0009>.

Bible printed in America on American made paper. **The third Sauer Bible, completed in 1776, was the first Bible printed from American made type.** Saur had just completed this third edition of 3000 copies when the American War for Independence interrupted the work. The British used the sheets for firewood, horse bedding, and “gun-wad” to make cartridges. Only a few of these Bibles have survived, but one is in the Dunham Bible Museum’s collection.

IV. Congress and Bible printing

In 1777 the country was in a crisis. Enemy forces had taken over New York and would soon threaten the capital of Philadelphia. Even with this threat, a concern of Congress was the shortage of Bibles in the land. The Chaplain of Congress, Patrick Allison, had brought the issue to Congress’ attention. The authority to print the King James Version of the Bible resided with the King of England, and the British had not allowed the printing of English Bibles in America. All English Bibles in America had to be imported. The War for Independence disrupted normal shipping, and Americans were beginning to feel a shortage of Bibles by the fall of 1777. A special Committee of Congress considered the problem, and on September 11 reported, **“The use of the Bible is so universal and its importance so great that your committee refers the above to the consideration of Congress, and if Congress shall not think it expedient to order the importation of types and paper, the Committee recommends that Congress will order the Committee of Commerce to import 20,000 Bibles from Holland, Scotland, or elsewhere, into the different parts of the States of the Union. Whereupon it was resolved accordingly to direct said Committee of Commerce to import 20,000 copies of the Bible.”**⁴

The British occupied Philadelphia, forcing Congress to flee, before action was taken on the resolution. It is noteworthy today, however, that the Continental Congress thought it was properly within its jurisdiction to purchase a supply of Bibles for the people.

V. Bible Printing in earliest USA

1. Francis Bailey’s New Testament

The rarest item in the Dunham Bible Museum’s collection is the New Testament printed in Philadelphia by Francis Bailey in 1780. The Museum owns the only known complete copy of one of the earliest English New Testaments printed in America.

Francis Bailey (1735? – 1815) was from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In 1771, Bailey opened his own print shop in Lancaster. His publications included sermons and pamphlets supporting the Patriot cause as well as a variety of other works. In 1776, he printed one of the earliest editions of Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, calling for American independence. When the Continental Congress fled Philadelphia during the War for Independence, Bailey printed many of the government documents in Lancaster. In 1777, he printed the first official edition of the *Articles of Confederation*, the first constitution of the young United States.

In 1780, with the British out of Philadelphia, Bailey established a printing shop and printed his New Testament. Bailey printed a wide variety of items, including political pamphlets, Pennsylvania money and stock certificates, and a book on how to build bridges.

⁴ *Journals of the Continental Congress*, 18:979-980.

2. The Bible of the Revolution⁵

Robert Aitken was a leading printer in colonial Philadelphia. He was the publisher of the *Journals of Congress* for the first Congress and in 1775, began a monthly publication supporting the American cause, *The Pennsylvania Magazine*, with Thomas Paine as the editor.

In 1777, Aitken printed one of the earliest English New Testaments printed in America. It was a small 12 mo. Book. Three more editions appeared in 1778, 1779, and 1781. Encouraged by the success of his Testament, in January 1781, Aitken presented a memorial to Congress:

The Memorial of Robert Aitken
of the City of Philadelphia, Printer

Humbly Sheweth

That in every well regulated Government in Christendom The Sacred Books of the Old and New Testament, commonly called the Holy Bible, are printed and published under the Authority of the Sovereign Powers, in order to prevent the fatal confusion that would arise, and the alarming Injuries the Christian Faith might suffer from the Spurious and erroneous Editions of Divine Revelation. That your Memorialist has no doubt but this work is an Object worthy of the attention of the Congress of the United States of America, who will not neglect spiritual security, while they are virtuously contending for temporal blessings. Under this persuasion, your Memorialist begs leave to, inform your Honours That he both begun and made considerable progress in a neat Edition of the Holy Scriptures for the use of schools, But being cautious of suffering his copy of the Bible to Issue forth without the sanction of Congress, Humbly prays that your Honours would take this important matter into serious consideration & would be pleased to appoint one Member or Members of your Honourable Body to inspect his work so that the same may be published under the Authority of Congress. And further, your Memorialist prays, that he may be commissioned or otherwise appointed & Authorised to print and vend Editions of, the Sacred Scriptures, in such manner and form as may best suit the wants and demands of the good people of these States, provided the same be in all things perfectly consonant to the Scriptures as heretofore established and received amongst us.

When Aitken had completed his printing, the Congressional committee requested the Chaplains of the Congress review the work. The two Chaplains of Congress who reviewed Aitken's work were Rev. Dr. William White and Rev. George Duffield. Rev. White was rector of Christ Church and an organizer of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America and later President of the first Bible Society in the United States, the Bible Society of Philadelphia. The Rev. George Duffield was pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and later a leader in the formation of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

Before the report of the Chaplains was received by Congress, Aitken sent another memorial to Congress, seeking its aid. He noted that this great printing had been "accomplished

⁵ Margaret Hills, "The First American Bible", preface to facsimile reprint of Robert Aitken's 1782 Bible by Arno Press, Philadelphia, 1968.

in the midst of the Confusion and Distresses of War” and suggested that Congress purchase a portion of the edition, sending 200 Bibles to each State.

Congress approved Aitken’s undertaking on September 12, 1782 (though not the purchase of the Bibles), and Aitken printed Congress’s endorsement of the printing at the front of the Bible, along with the report of the committee appointed to review his memorial and the report of the Congressional Chaplains.

A special copy was sent to John Hanson, then President of Congress, for use by Congress and as an example of the work they had honored. The first English Bible printed in America was small – 5 5/8” x 3 1/8”. Aitken printed 10,000 copies, just as the War for Independence was nearing its end. Dr. John Rodgers, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in New York, wrote George Washington and suggested a copy of Aitken’s Bible be given to each soldier when he was discharged. Washington replied that the good suggestion had come too late, for two-thirds of the army had already been discharged, noting, “It would have pleased me well, if Congress had been pleased to make such an important present to the brave fellows who have done so much for the security of their country’s rights and establishment.”

With the end of the war, Robert Aitken’s Bible had to compete with less expensive and attractive imported copies of the Scriptures. Though Aitken appealed to Congress in 1789 for a patent to the exclusive right to print Bibles in America for 14 years (as the King dispensed the right to print the Bible in England), it was denied. By 1791, Robert Aitken wrote to John Nicholson, Receiver of general taxes for the state of Pennsylvania:

I have calculated from my true loss by Continental money 3,000 and on the Edition of 10,000 Bibles 4000 – owing to these you may readily figure my situation. My house is under mortgage for a considerable sum, a foreign debt, though not if its value. I have other debts to pay, not considerable – what I earn goes to pay them as soon as earned...

Of the 10,000 Bibles Aitken printed, only about 40 are known today, making the Bible an extremely rare volume. One of these volumes is in the Dunham Bible Museum.

3. John Witherspoon’s “To the Reader”

Trenton, New Jersey printer Isaac Collins’ 1791 Bible was the first to replace the "Dedication to King James" at the front of all King James translations of the Bible with "To the Reader." After all, it was only fitting that having thrown off the King of England’s rule, the Americans did not want a Bible dedicated to King James! The introduction “To the Reader” was written by **John Witherspoon**, a Presbyterian minister, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and President of the College of New Jersey, later Princeton University. This introduction was reprinted in numerous Bibles for decades. In it, Witherspoon gives the history of the Bible and its translations, showing God's Providence in preserving His Word. Witherspoon also headed the group which carefully proofread the pages of this Bible, which was then used as a printer’s standard. The group compared other King James printings and went to the original languages when necessary to correct errors.

4. Bible translation by Charles Thomson, Secretary to Congress

Charles Thomson (1729-1824) made the first English translation of the New Testament published in America and the first translation of the Septuagint into the English language. Thomson was Secretary of Congress during the American Revolution and was

the only person who signed the original Declaration of Independence with President John Hancock. He also was responsible for designing the Great Seal of the United States, which continues in use today with minor changes.

After the adoption of the Constitution, Thomson resigned from Congress and spent 20 years working on his Bible translation. He copied and corrected the manuscript four times, then had it published by Jane Aitken, daughter of printer Robert Aitken and the first woman to print any part of the Bible in America. Interestingly, the name “Cha. Thomson” appears as the signer of the Congressional resolution in the front of the 1782 Bible published by Robert Aitken, the first complete English Bible printed in America. In 1815 he also published *A Synopsis of the Four Evangelists, or a Regular History of the Conception, Birth, Doctrine, Miracles, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ, in the Words of the Evangelists*.

5. **Thomas Jefferson’s *Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth***

Thomas Jefferson appreciated Jesus’ ethics, but he did not believe Jesus was divine. He concluded that the New Testament was written by unlearned apostles who often misunderstood Jesus and misrepresented his teaching. Jefferson cut and pasted together extracts from printed Greek, Latin, French, and English New Testaments, assembling a text which he thought best expressed what Jesus really taught. In many ways, Jefferson’s approach was a forerunner of that used by the modern Jesus Seminar. As historian and Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin noted, Jefferson “had projected his own qualities and limitations into Jesus.”⁶

Jefferson’s work was for his own private use and not compiled for publication. Congress ordered the printing of 9,000 of Jefferson’s collection in 1904, 3,000 for the use of the Senate and 6,000 for the use of the House. The Dunham Bible Museum has the printed edition made by Congress in 1904.

6. **The First Bible Printed in New York, 1792**

This first Bible printed in New York was an edition of the “Self-Interpreting Bible” by the noted Scottish minister John Brown (1722-1787). Although self-educated, Brown prepared an annotated Bible, Bible dictionary and concordance, and a metrical version of the Psalms which continued to be printed in America throughout the 19th century. The *Self-Interpreting Bible* is so named because the notes helped interpret the Bible.

This folio Bible was printed by subscription in 40 parts over a period of two years. The subscribers are listed at the front of the Bible with **George Washington** heading the list. Washington was President at the time and living in New York City, then the capital of the young United States. Other government officials listed as subscribers were **Alexander Hamilton**, Secretary of Treasury; **John Knox**, Secretary of War, and **John Jay**, Chief Justice of the United States. The 555 subscribers listed by name came from 9 of the 13 states. The top five occupations of subscribers were lawyers (60), carpenters (52), merchants (40), tailors (34), and cordwainers (28).

Fitting for a Bible published in the capital of the young United States, the frontispiece of the Bible reflects the patriotic theme of the importance of the Bible and the Constitution to the young nation. America is shown with an Indian headdress on, seated in front of a

⁶ Daniel J. Boorstin. *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson*, University of Chicago Press, 1993, 157.

liberty tree with names of patriots posted: Washington, Montgomery, Greene, Franklin, Warren, Adams, Mercer, Putnam, Jay, Clinton, Gates, Morris, [La]Fayette. In her right hand America is holding the Constitution, and with her left hand receives the Bible from Peace, while Liberty (with the Liberty pole and cap) looks on. The engraving clearly depicts the importance of both the Constitution and the Bible for the new nation.

7. **George Washington** – Father of his Country: commander of the Continental Army, President of the Constitutional Convention, 1st President – all recognized Washington as a gentleman of impeccable character. 2 women very influential in his life – his mother and his wife Martha

1. **Mary Ball Washington** (1708-1789) – Her husband, George’s father, died when George was eleven. On his deathbed, Augustine Washington gave his son three books on prayer. Mary Ball, now a single mother, educated her five children at home. She continued the practice they had of reading sermons together, a practice George continued as President. Among the books used in educating George: *The Sufficiency of a Standing Revelation*, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation*, and Matthew Hale’s *Contemplations, Moral and Divine*.

In later life, Mary Ball lived near her daughter’s family in Fredericksburg, Virginia. She frequently walked to a nearby outcropping of rocks to pray, so that these became known as the Prayer Rocks.

When George was elected President, he and Martha went to tell her the news. She was ill and weak and didn’t think she would live long. He was ready to decline the Presidency and care for his mother. She, however, told him to fulfill the duty heaven had foreordained for him and go with her blessing.

2. **Martha Custis** (1731-1802) – throughout her life, every day after breakfast she spent an hour reading the Scriptures and in thanksgiving and prayer. Visitors often noticed her face especially sweet and peaceful when she came from her devotions. In the evenings, the Washingtons read together a chapter and psalm from the family Bible and knelt in evening prayer. Martha’s maid would often sign a hymn in the evening gathering. During the winter encampments, Martha would join George with the army, and they would continue their practice of daily devotions; With her husband, Martha became a model of kindness and Christian virtue.
3. George Washington’s writings are replete with Scriptural allusions and references. e.g. Circular to states in 1783, as resigned his position as commander of the army contains many Scriptural allusions and references to Providence and the blessings of Heaven.

He noted that having the Scripture, Divine Revelation, was one of the highest blessings for Americans:

“The foundation of our Empire was not laid in the gloomy age of Ignorance and Superstition, but at an Epocha when the rights of mankind were better understood and more clearly defined, than at any former period, the researches of the human

mind, after social happiness, have been carried to a great extent, the Treasures of knowledge, acquired by the labours of Philosophers, Sages and Legislatures, through a long succession of years, are laid open for our use, and their collected wisdom may be happily applied in the Establishment of our forms of Government; the free cultivation of Letters, the unbounded extension of Commerce, the progressive refinement of Manners, the growing liberality of sentiment, **and above all, the pure and benign light of Revelation, have had a meliorating influence on mankind and increased the blessings of Society.** At this auspicious period, the United States came into existence as a Nation, and if their Citizens should not be completely free and happy, the fault will be entirely their own.”⁷

VI. Other American Leaders and Scripture

1. Benjamin Franklin/Thomas Jefferson – design for the great seal of the US followed an illustration on the title page of early Geneva Bibles. It showed Pharaoh pursuing the Israelites to the Red Sea, Moses raising his rod, the waters parting, and Israelites fleeing to freedom. The inscription around the seal read “Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God.”⁸
2. Benjamin Franklin at the Constitutional Convention of 1787- - appeals for prayer:

In this Situation of this Assembly, groping, as it were in the dark (Job 12:25) to find Political Truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when present to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights (James 1:17) to illuminate our Understandings? In the Beginning of the Contest with Britain, when we were sensible of Danger, we had daily Prayers in this Room for the Divine Protection. Our Prayers, Sir, were heard - and they were graciously answered...And have we now forgotten that powerful Friend? Or do we imagine we no longer need its assistance? **I have lived, Sir, a long time; and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this Truth, that GOD governs in the Affairs of Men (Daniel 4:17 – “the most High ruleth in the Kingdome of men, and giveth it to whomsoever hee will...).** **And if a Sparrow cannot fall to the Ground without his Notice (Matthew 10:29; Luke 12:6), is it probable that an Empire can rise without his Aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred Writings, that “except the Lord build the House, they labour in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1).** **I firmly believe this; and I also believe, that without his concurring Aid, we shall succeed in this political Building no better than the Builders of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9); we shall be divided by our little, partial, local Interests, our Projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a Reproach and a Bye-word (cf. Deut. 28:37; I Kings 9:7; II Chronicles 7:20; Psalm 44:14) down to future Ages. And, what is worse, Mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate Instance,**

⁷ George Washington, “Circular Letter to the States”, *George Washington’s Mount Vernon*, <http://www.mountvernon.org/digital-encyclopedia/article/circular-letter-to-the-states/>.

⁸ “Proposal for the Great Seal of the United States, [Before 14 August 1776], *Founders Online, National Archives*, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-22-02-0330>.

despair of establishing Government by human Wisdom, and leave it to Chance, War, and Conquest.⁹

3. The first president of the American Bible Society was **Elias Boudinot** (1740-1821), who had been baptized by evangelist George Whitefield and had been President of the Continental Congress and director of the U.S. mint. With all of his important positions in government, Boudinot believed the presidency of the American Bible Society (formed in 1816 to insure there was a Bible in every house in America) was the “greatest honor conferred on me this side of the grave.”¹⁰
4. The Society’s second President was **John Jay (1745-1829)**, a signer of the Treaty of Paris concluding the American Revolution, one of the writers of the Federalist Papers, and the first chief Justice of the Supreme Court.
5. **Dr. Benjamin Rush** (1745-1813) was a distinguished physician, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and for many years Treasurer of the U.S. Mint. He wrote a letter which later became a tract entitled “A Defence of the Use of the Bible in Schools.” In it he wrote,
“we waste so much time and money in punishing crimes and take so little pains to prevent them. We profess to be republicans, and yet we neglect the only means of establishing and perpetuating our republican forms of government, that is, the universal education of our youth in the principles of Christianity by means of the Bible; for this divine book, above all others, favors that equality among mankind, that respect for just laws; and all those sober and frugal virtues which constitute the soul of republicanism.”¹¹

VII. Conclusion:

The last paragraph of Washington’s 1783 letter to the States:

“I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would have you, and the State over which you preside, in his holy protection, that he would incline the hearts of the Citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to Government, to entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another, for their fellow Citizens of the United States at large, and particularly for their brethren who have served in the Field, and finally, that he would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all, to do Justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that Charity (Micah 6:8), humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation.”

⁹ *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*, 91-92.

¹⁰ Paul C. Gutjahr. *An American Bible*. Stanford University Press, 1999, 9.

¹¹ Benjamin Rush. “A Defence of the Use of the Bible as a School Book,” *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical*. Thomas and William Bradford, 1806, 93-113.