

How the Bible Shaped America's Founding Generation

Regarding the Bible's influence on America, Andrew Jackson, America's seventh president, declared, "That book, sir, is the rock on which our Republic rests." Born in 1767, Jackson's life overlapped that of the founding generation, and his statement reflects the general sentiment of the founding generation toward the Bible.

George Washington Honors and Esteems the Bible

When, for example, George Washington chose to place his hand on a Bible to take the oath of office it was no mere formality, but a declaration that the Bible would be the ultimate source of wisdom and guidance for his administration. He also once said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible" (Hyatt, *5 Pillars of the American Republic*, 13).

While president, Washington's nephew, Robert Lewis, served as his secretary and lived with him. Lewis said that he had accidentally witnessed Washington's private devotions in his library both morning and evening and that on those occasions he had seen him in a kneeling posture with a Bible open before him, and that he believed such to have been his daily practice.

James Madison's Biblical Worldview

James Madison, the chief architect of the U.S. Constitution, had a thorough Christian upbringing and training. At the College of New Jersey, he was mentored by the school's president, John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian Reformer and signer of the Declaration of Independence, who once declared, "Cursed is all education that is contrary to Christ."

After completing his studies, Madison remained at the college where worked on a project translating the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into English. His estimation of the Bible was demonstrated when as president, in 1812, he signed a federal bill that provided economic aid for a Bible society in its goal of the mass distribution of the Bible.

Dr. D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe were right when they said, "Madison's worldview was one shaped by the Bible more than any other source" (Hyatt, *5 Pillars of the American Republic*, 14).

The Founders Primary Authority

From the beginning, the Bible had been incorporated into all the learning of the schools in Colonial America. For example, *The New England Primer* coupled Bible verses and church doctrine with the learning of the ABCs. The letter "A," for example, was associated with "Adam" and the statement, "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." Children in early America learned to read with their primer in one hand and their Bible in the other.

Knowing how the Founders esteemed and revered the Bible, it comes as no surprise that The First Continental Congress was opened with Bible reading and prayer. It is also no surprise that when Benjamin Franklin called the Constitutional Convention to Prayer, he quoted from both the Psalms and the Gospels (Hyatt, *5 Pillars of the American Republic*, 14).

Indeed, a ten-year project instituted to discover where the Founders got their ideas for America's founding documents found that by far the single most cited authority in their writings was the Bible. They were people of the Book and consciously and unconsciously used it as the standard for measuring all other writings both ancient and modern.

Congress Recommends the First English Bible Printed in America

The Founders' respect for the Bible was highlighted when the first English Bible printed in America in 1782 included a recommendation from Congress. The producer of the Bible, Robert Aitken, had written a letter to Congress in which he asked for that government body's sanction on his work. In the letter, Aitken called this Bible, "a neat Edition of the Scriptures for the use in schools."

Congress enthusiastically responded to his request and offered the following recommendation to be included in this first English Bible printed in America.

Resolved: That the United States in Congress assembled, highly approve the pious and laudable undertaking of Mr. Aitken, as subservient to the interest of religion as well as an instance of the progress of the arts in this country, and being satisfied from the above report, of his care and accuracy in the execution of the work they recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States and hereby authorize him to publish this recommendation in the manner he shall think proper.

The Founders Not Impacted by Deism

The Founders lived at a time when the European Enlightenment and its exaltation of reason was drawing many on the European continent away from the Bible. However, the Enlightenment and its religious counterpart, Deism, never gained popularity in America. The late Harvard professor, Perry Miller, called Deism an "exotic plant" that never took root in American soil. America's Founders saw no dichotomy between Biblical revelation and reason. The well-known Catholic scholar, William Novak, says,

Everywhere that reason led, Americans found the Bible. If they read Francis Bacon, they found the Bible. If they read Isaac Newton or John Milton, they found the Bible. In Shakespeare, they found the Bible. In the world of the

founders, the Bible was an unavoidable and useful rod of measurement, a stimulus to intellectual innovation (Hyatt, 5 Pillars of the American Republic, 16).

The Bible Impacted All of American Life

When the French sociologist, Alexis de Tocqueville, visited America in 1831 to study her institutions, he said, "The religious atmosphere of the country was the first thing that struck me." In describing the opening of America's western frontier, he was impressed with the character of those adventurers, whom he said "penetrated the wilds of the New World with the Bible, an axe, and some newspapers."

Yes, Jackson was right. The Bible was the rock on which the early American republic rested. This profound influence of the Bible on the founding of America was confirmed by her 26th president, Theodore Roosevelt, who said, "No other book of any kind ever written in English has ever so affected the whole life of a people."

What Christians Can Do

How far we have fallen! The Book that made America great has become an object of disdain and ridicule by an arrogant, narcissistic cultural elite. America's Founders would be astounded to know that the book they so revered is now banned from public schools and that government officials are threatened with lawsuits for holding Bible studies with their colleagues.

Yes, this un-American hostility to the Bible is a marker showing the extent to which the nation has been severed from its roots. It also serves as a wake up call for Christians in America to repent of their burning desire for acceptance by modern culture and become salt and light to this generation and begin praying for another great, national spiritual awakening. {eoa}

This article was derived from Dr. Eddie Hyatt's latest book, [5 Pillars of the American Republic](#), available from Amazon and his website at .