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# “This Is Our Jerusalem”: Early American Evangelical Localizations of the Hebraic Republic

Steele Brand

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Academic Editors: Victor Roudometof and Peter Iver Kaufman

Politics, Philosophy, and Economics Program, The King’s College, 56 Broadway, New York, NY 10004, USA;  
sbrand@tkc.edu; Tel.: +1-212-659-7200

**Abstract:** This paper examines how evangelical pastors applied Protestant notions of a Hebraic Republic for their parishioners as America transitioned from a colonial frontier to a new republic. As the American constitutions took shape during and after the Revolution, many evangelical pastors argued that America emulated or was inspired by the Israelite polity as described by the Old Testament. America and its institutions thus became a reincarnated Hebraic Republic, a new “city on a hill”, and a new Jerusalem. Originally these pastors drew on a broader, global movement that was shaping republican attempts at reform in Europe, but as they localized the biblical model to their own particular experiences, they brought new meaning to it and exported the transformed model back out to the world.

**Keywords:** hebraic republic; evangelical; preaching; sermon; constitutionalism

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On 5 October 2015, contractors used the cover of darkness and an increased presence of state police to separate a granite monument of the 10 Commandments from its base and remove it from the premises of the Oklahoma capitol. So ended the long drama stirred by objections that the monument violated the constitutional separation of church and state, objections upheld by the Oklahoma Supreme Court earlier that year. The situation in Oklahoma was another episode in an ongoing American saga. Attempts to remove a similar monument at the Texas capitol a decade ago were unsuccessful. The 10 Commandments controversy has also been acted out recently in other states, including Kentucky, Arkansas, and Alabama, and the constitutional question is far from settled. With Moses and his famous body of laws present in many civic buildings throughout the country—including the architecture of the U.S. Capitol and the Supreme Court—it is unlikely that Americans have seen the end of attempts to remove them or defend them.

America’s peculiar history regarding the 10 Commandments stretches back to its origins, and this paper will explain the role that early American evangelical pastors played in this history. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, American ministers formulated a distinctive political theology derived from the broader movements of Protestantism and republicanism in Europe. These two movements were localized in particular ways as pulpit-orators attempted to weigh in on the structure and institutions of the new governments coming into existence in America. The first task here, then, is to define early American evangelicals in their glocal context, after which this study will describe the history of how they applied the Hebraic Republic in the colonial, revolutionary, and constitutional periods.

## 1. The Glocal Nature of American Evangelicalism

So what is American evangelicalism? The terms “evangelicalism” and “evangelical” are difficult to define precisely according to two prominent scholars of American evangelicalism, George Marsden and Barry Hankins. Evangelicalism is a broader movement with unique and diverse strains that have shifted over time. Nonetheless, it is possible to provide parameters. Evangelicalism’s origins can be traced to the Reformation inaugurated by Martin Luther in 1517. As the name implies, evangelicals

emphasized the “gospel” and grew out of earlier movements such as Pietism and Puritanism. The spiritual awakenings of the 18th century carved out evangelicalism as a distinct movement within the English-speaking, Protestant world. Evangelicals came to be associated with revivalism, biblical preaching, dramatic conversions, and a personal relationship with Christ, whose death on the cross afforded salvation ([1], pp. 3–4). Evangelicalism predominated in American religious life and influenced “virtually all American denominations...such as the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ, and others” ([2], pp. 1–2). Given their overwhelming influence in American religious life, understanding how evangelicals originally conceived the Hebraic Republic as a model will help demystify why symbols such as the 10 Commandments still cause strife.

Scholars of evangelicalism such as Marsden, Hankins, Mark Noll, and Ellis Sandoz have discussed the biblical applications that evangelical pastors used to influence American citizens, institutions, and constitutions. At the same time political theorists such as Eric Nelson have recently described the growing intellectual appeal of the “Hebraic Republic” in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. This study brings together these two fields and examines how American evangelical pastors localized the Hebraic Republic to the unique circumstances of America during its inception.

This article’s chronological approach—the early colonial period, the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary period, and then the constitutional phase—illustrates that glocalization often happens “through multiple currents or waves” rather than a purely binary global or local framework ([3], p. 1392). American evangelicals and their manner of applying the Hebraic Republic was shaped by international events—first colonization and mercantilism, then wars with European powers like the French, and then the colonists’ rebellion against Great Britain, and finally the American desire to create a new constitutional order that would serve as a republican beacon to the world. The entire process was shaped by this interactive nature. For evangelicals, the globalization of the 17th and 18th centuries initially decreased the tension between global and local forms of religion. It presented opportunities to apply new concepts in different ways. However, Americans then re-territorialized their hybridization of concepts like the Hebraic Republic ([4], pp. 1018–19). America had begun as an experiment in religious liberty, which served as a release valve for European religious dissenters, but as Americans increasingly saw their states and nation as republics on the Hebraic model, they were willing to take up arms to create their own, independent state, complete with its own civil religion.

On the one hand American evangelicals were part of a global Protestant project that was interpreting and applying the Old Testament in new republican political orders. Colonists syncretized Protestantism and early modern republicanism with their evangelical worship services. On the other hand, Americans localized the Hebraic Republic. As a part of the *Mundus Novus*, Protestant republicans were given a freer hand to advocate more comprehensive political reforms. Indeed, they were not merely reforming Old World political systems, but creating new ones in a new world. Europe was exporting its evangelicals, and America was a natural destination. Political and religious thought was thus reborn, giving it a longer lifespan than pietistic Protestant republicanism in Europe.

In some cases, Jews and Catholics participated in the project of defining America’s messianic mission. For the Jews America provided opportunities to experiment with the tradition of federal covenantalism [5,6]. Nonetheless, early American Protestants clearly saw Jews—regardless of their willingness to envision America as a new messiah in the covenantal tradition—as subordinate to the evangelical cause. Former President of the Continental Congress and U.S. Congressman, Elias Boudinot, for example, participated in a scheme to incorporate Jews into America’s new world order, with the clear intention of converting them in the process. Jews could make America their new Zion, but they did so under the influence of evangelical Zionism ([7], pp. 101–3). Catholics were less amenable to evangelical visions of America. Evangelicals were as anti-Catholic as most Protestants, and although Catholics such as Charles Carroll signed the Declaration of Independence and served as U.S. Senator, he was the exception. The Catholic establishment was still opposed to republicanism and evangelicalism, meaning that Catholics were forced to establish a separate identity and a separate civil religion [8]. It was the evangelical conception of the Hebraic Republic, and not the Jewish or Catholic

interpretation, that would be applied in the 18th century. And when evangelicalism in the United States began to fade in later centuries, so would the Hebraic Republic ([9], pp. 107–9).

As Ugo Dessi recently pointed out in his study of Hawaiian Shin Buddhism, globalization can catalyze an alteration in the substance and style of religion [10]. In the American colonies, individual pastors were using the most important part of evangelical worship—the preaching of the word—to exhort their parishioners to think of their sacred text as an incitement to rebellion and a model for republican governance. Local evangelical church services were thus being transformed into democratic political movements of national importance. Evangelicalism was itself being democratized in a distinctly American way. As these sermons spread more broadly in pamphlet form throughout the colonies, other faiths in the Americas—most notably Jews and Catholics—were encouraged to syncretize or assimilate into the nascent American civil religion.

This evangelical application of biblical concepts, being both global and local, has left a lingering legacy on American political life. Modern evangelicals still routinely apply Old Testament passages to modern political issues from homosexual marriage to foreign policy [11,12]. Some activists want to restore a particular brand of evangelical political thought that would make America a “Christian nation” [13]. And past presidents from Bill Clinton to George W. Bush to Barack Obama have felt the necessity to defend their evangelical credentials (or, at the very least, their Christ-appreciating, Protestant credentials) because large proportions of the voting population clamor for it.

During Oklahoma’s 10 Commandments controversy, one evangelical pastor even led a horse troop on a 109-mile ride to the Capitol to protest its removal. He believes American institutions and freedoms are inextricably linked to the Ten Commandments, and he and his parishioners, the “Glory Riders”, were taken seriously. When this saintly cavalry arrived at the Capitol in late October of 2015, they were greeted by a supportive crowd and then granted an audience with the governor to make their case [14]. American evangelicals have not always taken to such dramatic, equestrian displays of piety, but impassioned pleas for the Bible’s application in politics have been in America from the moment that evangelicalism began.

## 2. Europe’s “Hebraic Republic” Reaches the American Colonies

As a model for Western governments, Old Testament Israel first gained political traction between the emperors Constantine and Theodosius in the 4th century. The acceptance and incorporation of Christianity into the Roman political structure created Christendom. The political, religious, and moral behaviors of Israel were filtered through the Old Testament into Christendom, and from there into the pulpits, political treatises, and constitutions of Europe and the Americas. Whether Christendom was good for the European church or state, it made Israel an important historical source for lawmaking and war-making. European Christians were eager to apply the Bible to the Christian states that emerged in the early medieval period. The famous early British king, Alfred the Great of Wessex, for example, appended the 10 Commandments to his codification of Anglo-Saxon laws.

Old Testament laws and political ideals carried over into the medieval world, but it was not until the early modern period that Israel’s “Hebraic Republic” became popular like it had never been before. In the 16th century, mass printing and the Protestant Reformation combined to spread theological and political republicanism, and the Bible was becoming the most important source for political theory. The 17th century became so inundated with biblical political thought that it is often called the “Biblical Century”. Protestants eagerly interpreted ancient Israel as a constitutional order that should be applied to their own circumstances, and the spread of rabbinic exegesis on the Old Testament polity accelerated Protestant scholarship on the Hebraic Republic. In the 16th and 17th centuries, political thinkers like Bonaventure Cornelius Bertram, Carlo Sigonio, Franciscus Junius, Wilhelm Zepper, Joachim Stephani, Hugo Grotius, Petrus Cunaeus, and Wilhelm Schickard composed treatises on the continent. The nascent Dutch Republic was a crucial hub for Hebraic political thought at this time because it provided presses for publication and afforded protection to authors ([15], pp. 17–22).

Scholars on the British Isles began completing their own treatments of the Hebraic Republic by the 17th century. Thomas Godwyn authored *Moses and Aaron: Civil and Ecclesiastical Rites Used by the Ancient Hebrews*, and John Selden followed with similar works in Latin. The republicans John Milton and Algernon Sidney relied on the biblical texts in Deuteronomy 17 and 1 Samuel 8 to argue for republican exclusivism (that only republics are the proper sort of government). England's most important treatments came from James Harrington and Thomas Hobbes, who used the ancient Israelite Commonwealth as a model for their writings when Puritans were establishing their commonwealth in England in the events surrounding the English Civil War ([15], pp. 20–22, 37–56). Harrington and Hobbes used the example of the ancient Israelite Commonwealth in combination with other examples from history to support their own very different visions of the ideal state. For Harrington, the best and most stable form of government would be an aristocracy of limited, balanced powers inspired by the Hebraic example [16]. Hobbes reacted against this model amidst the turbulence of the English Civil War. He argued that absolute monarchy was the best form of commonwealth and the one most able to provide peace and security as a model [17].

By the time that Hobbes and Harrington were writing, the Hebraic Republic had already gained traction in the American colonies. In 1611, for example, Anglican minister Alexander Whitaker wrote to the Virginia Company with ancient Israel in mind. Whitaker had arrived in Jamestown and then taken part in the founding of Henrico. In reassuring the Virginia Company that its economic prospects were sound, he shrewdly applied the Israelites wandering in the desert for 40 years. Just as Israel had been selected and guided to enjoy the fruits of the Promised Land by God himself, so would the colonies of the Virginia Company eventually. In their case, he encouraged, they should “look for a shorter time of reward” ([18], pp. 26, 35–36).

The founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony by Pilgrims and Puritans laid a stronger evangelical foundation in New England than in Virginia, and the scriptural applications were proportionally heavier. In the Mayflower Compact from 1620, the Pilgrims pledged to “covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic”. In 1638 the Portsmouth Compact used similar language and even appended Old Testament passages from Exodus, Chronicles, and Kings in the margin. The language used here was simultaneously biblical and republican. To “covenant together” is an Old Testament pledge involving Yahweh as the divine witness to a sacred agreement. In the case of the Israelites, Yahweh was both a divine witness and a party to the act of ancient Israel's formation as a people group bound together by a religious and political constitution, the Torah.

The “civil body politic” was a legal term derived from English political thinkers who emphasized the shepherding leadership of their king and the consent of his citizens. But the idea was also biblical. In its ancient context, Israel's covenantal political ideology was a unique contribution to Near Eastern political thought. Biblical writers adopted Hittite or Assyrian suzerain-vassal treaties for the covenants found in Exodus-Numbers and Deuteronomy, and then they created a *via media* between imperial monarchies like Egypt, petty warlords like the Canaanites, and the patriarchal tribalism common to nomads. The covenants thus used existing treaty structures to unify the Israelites as a vassal citizenry under their suzerain Yahweh. The Pentateuch and the historical books went beyond the treaty structure, however, by establishing an early breed of constitutionalism, which included ancient parallels to the rule of law, consent of the governed, mixed government, and civic virtue. This was a novel system in its own day, and even though it was hardly a republic by modern standards, biblical exegetes from the 16th to the 18th centuries were eager to see it as a republican form of government that they should emulate (on the ancient covenant see ([19–22]; [23], pp. 283–307); for modern takes, see ([5,24,25]; [26], pp. 16–27).

This polity of the Hebraic Republic inspired 17th-century English Puritans in various ways. Some would participate in the Parliamentary struggles that led up to the English Civil War of the 1640s and the Commonwealth of the 1650s. In America, however, the Puritans had already established their own commonwealths. John Winthrop, for example, famously described the Massachusetts Bay Colony he and his fellow colonists were erecting as a “city upon a hill” [27]. A lawyer and future

governor of the colony, Winthrop used biblical metaphors in his 1630 speech to inspire colonists as they crossed the Atlantic. The “city on a hill” metaphor, which is a commonplace in America’s self-image today, was a reference to Matthew 5:14 [28]. This passage follows the Beatitudes, and Christ himself applied the “city on a hill”, “salt”, “light”, and “candlestick” metaphors to describe the nature of the Kingdom of God. Christ referred to a spiritual community, but Winthrop applied the passage to a temporal, political community in America. And this is the interpretation that Americans latched on to. John F. Kennedy later applied Winthrop’s political use of the metaphor to the American nation [29], and Ronald Reagan ensured its permanence as an American metaphor by invoking it in his campaign and presidency [30].

Ironically, Winthrop would probably have been surprised that this one phrase has become so popular today given that there were so many to choose from. His speech invoked numerous scriptural passages, and the “city on a hill” phrase is sandwiched between Old Testament invocations to justice and piety. In fact, he charismatically closes his sermon with Moses’ farewell speech in Deuteronomy, and the parallels between Moses’ Hebraic Republic and Winthrop’s New World commonwealth would have been powerful in the colonists’ minds. Like ancient Israel emerging from the Exodus and the Wilderness, the Puritans were seeking religious freedom and a new political community in their own promised land.

By the 1650s, however, it was clear that Winthrop’s biblical commonwealths were not about to inaugurate a new republican utopia in the Hebraic mold. Puritans in England were watching their own republican experiment decay at the same time that American colonists saw the judgment of God in a series of “crop failures, Indian wars, droughts, and epidemics” ([18], p. 27). In *God’s Controversy with New England*, published in 1662, Michael Wigglesworth applied events in biblical Israel’s history to Puritan New England. Wigglesworth saw Yahweh’s judgment of Israel now applied to the colonists. Like Israel, they had broken their “Covenant”, and like the generations that followed Joshua and the elders in the book of Judges, the colonists incurred the wrath and judgment of God “for growing like the cursed Canaanites” ([18], pp. 44, 47, 49). It seemed as though the dream of a new promised land in the American colonies would dissolve before it had ever truly begun.

The Great Awakening that began in 1741, however, reanimated Old Testament applications to the American colonies, especially in New England. Pulpit and pamphlet were popular places for biblical analogies. From 1740 to 1800 “over 1800 sermons were published in Massachusetts and Connecticut alone” ([31], p. x). Average colonists caught up in the escalating series of events from the mid-18th century to the end of the Revolution were not reading the sophisticated treatises of Blackstone, Montesquieu, and Locke. Instead, they were influenced by those everyday orators, their pastors. And when many American pastors weighed in on political topics, they were prone to use the historical example of Israel and its body of laws.

The two most famous orators of the Great Awakening were Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield, and both invoked Israel as a model for the colonies. Edwards claimed that it was no coincidence that America was discovered at the same time as the Reformation was about to begin. He saw America—and especially New England—as the new light of the church, born out of the wilderness like Israel had been ([18], pp. 55–57).

George Whitfield’s 1746 sermon *Britain’s Mercies and Britain’s Duty* was preached in Philadelphia and printed in Boston. Throughout the sermon he jumped back and forth between classical and biblical references, but he cited “the scriptures” as more valuable than the summation of all the classical. The “Jewish polity” in particular was “too applicable” ([32], p. 128). By employing the language of European Protestant republicanism, Whitfield was making one of the first direct parallels of the Old Testament’s Hebraic Republic to America. His application was both politically and militarily appropriate given that he preached in light of the ongoing King George’s War. Whitfield closed his sermon with the admonition to think of the perils that confronted Israel throughout its history. Colonial Americans should keep in mind Samuel’s admonition to the Israelites to “Only fear the Lord and serve Him” ([32], p. 135).

The polity of the Israelites provided ministers with an abundant resource of sound laws, just institutions, and virtuous statesmen. It also presented political villains: tyrants such as the pharaoh, Rehoboam, and Ahab and foreign enemies such as the Egyptians, Canaanites, and Babylonians. Boston Congregationalist Charles Chauncy, for example, cited a favorite biblical hero of American pastors, Moses' father-in-law Jethro. Jethro's federalism and the Pentateuchal law that followed his counsel to Moses were useful examples for colonial magistrates ([32], pp. 152–53, 164). In the midst of the French and Indian War, the ardently Calvinist Samuel Dunbar preached an election sermon on another hero, King Asa; Dunbar compared his righteousness at one point to that of King George ([32], p. 223).

The Hebraic Republic was starting to inspire institutional structures as well. By the middle of the 18th century, Americans were already characterizing colonial governments as mixed polities. Their muse however, was not Montesquieu, who had not yet reached the English-speaking world. Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* would play a predominant role in the constitutional debates later in the century, but republicanism for evangelicals began with scripture. They were thinking of Jethro, Moses, Pentateuchal laws, and early Protestant applications of the Old Testament's mixed government in places like the Dutch Republic. As the colonies began formulating their own governments free of their British overlords, the Hebraic Republic would be drawn on again as pastors counseled citizens and statesmen alike.

### 3. The "Exodus" of the American Revolution

Six years after Dunbar preached his election sermon praising King George, American pastors began trading biblical heroes for villains in their comparisons. In the midst of the Stamp Act controversy Unitarian Jonathan Mayhew likened the colonists and "the flight of our forefathers into the deserts [sic] of America" to Joseph's betrayal and plight in Egypt ([32], p. 260). Mayhew was also thinking about the political misdeeds of Britain against the colonists. He referenced ancient and modern philosophers from Plato and Cicero to Sidney and Locke in his defense of liberty, but he claimed that he first learned about liberty from scripture. God punished the ancient Israelites with an "absolute monarchy", and they lost their "free commonwealth". For Mayhew Americans should heed this lesson from the collapse of the ancient Jewish Republic and remember that God alone was king.

When the Stamp Act was repealed in 1766, Charles Chauncy described the Americans as having survived an ordeal not unlike the Hebrew bondage in Egypt ([33], pp. 127–29). In 1773 the Baptist minister John Allen drew out the subtleties of the Old Testament model as referenced by Mayhew and Chauncy. Allen explained that the British monarchy was not inherently evil. After all, the Israelites still functioned as a commonwealth under David and Solomon, who behaved as "kings...made for the people". But when British monarchs behaved like Rehoboam or Ahab, they set themselves up as tyrants that scorned the people and placed their own majesty before God's ([32], pp. 316–17, 321, 323).

By the mid-1770s the Hebraic Republic was a powerful example in the American colonies, and not simply for evangelical pastors. Even that impassioned opponent of organized religion, Thomas Paine, used the political thought of the Old Testament. In his famous pamphlet, *Common Sense*, Paine extensively employed themes from 1 Samuel to challenge the institution of monarchy and argue for a new American republic. Yet Paine was only one of hundreds who were regularly advocating how the Bible should apply to America at the moment of its birth. New Jersey Presbyterian Abraham Keteltas, for example, referenced 1 Samuel's litany of kingly abuses in a similar but original manner in 1777 ([32], p. 589). Every Sunday pastors like Keteltas ascended into the pulpit and inveighed against this or inspired their parishioners to do that. They addressed a spectrum of ethical and theological topics, but politics was one of their favorites—especially in their routine election sermons before political decision-making at the local or regional level. Donald Lutz found that 80% of political writings during the 1770s were published sermons ([34], pp. 140, 142). Like the Portsmouth Compact and Paine, these sermons prioritized the Pentateuch and historical books—especially Exodus, Deuteronomy, and the books of Samuel [31,33].

American evangelicals were interested in how the Hebraic Republic could apply to the United States, but to varying degrees and with different conclusions. Whereas descendants of the Pilgrims and Puritans endeavored to use the Bible as a legal guide for developing specific institutions and laws, Baptists like John Leland viewed these tendencies with trepidation. They could easily lead to political and religious tyranny. In their thinking, the Bible emphasized the freedom of the church, not political templates ([35], pp. 25–36). Baptist pastor Isaac Backus found the Hebraic Republic a remarkable ancient model, but he was uncomfortable making parallels because of the discontinuity between Old Testament laws and modern states. In his *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty* in 1773, he criticized Massachusetts for attempting to apply “Moses’s laws...to frame a Christian commonwealth here.” In doing so, Backus feared that the church would be ensnared by the state ([32], pp. 338, 342–47). Backus and Leland’s critiques represented a view of the Hebraic Republic that would become more prominent over time in the American colonies. It may have much to offer in terms of checks and balances and rule by the people, but the Old Testament model should not be used to recommend a fusion of church and state. Instead, the church should be freed from the state, and the state should afford religious liberty to its citizens.

Most ardent evangelical advocates of the Revolution were not wary of such parallels, however. As the American colonies moved closer to war with Britain, pastors needed to draw on their most dramatic and compelling arguments, and the ancient Israelite polity was the best possible choice. Connecticut minister Samuel Sherwood’s 1774 sermon, for example, discussed the British constitution. He found it helpful in the impending crisis to describe David’s rule in terms of a constitutional monarchy, and enjoined modern rulers to rule according to his standards of righteousness (he graciously ignored the decidedly unrighteous incident where David raped Bathsheeba and murdered her husband Uriah) ([32], pp. 384–85).

When the revolution erupted, Moses Mather’s 1775 sermon title proclaimed the partisan opinion of patriotic pastors: *America’s Appeal to the Impartial World*. Mather exhorted his listeners to endure the present conflagration by recalling that only the strong made it through the Exodus from Egypt to the promised land ([32], p. 476). Britain was like the mighty tyrant Egypt, but God would guide the Americans through their contest just as he had miraculously guided the Israelites ([32], p. 489). Jacob Cushing’s fiery sermon commemorating Lexington and Concord argued that as Yahweh promised to smite the enemies of Moses’ new republic, he would do the same for the enemies of America’s new republic ([32], pp. 611–13). Philadelphia Presbyterian George Duffield, and Connecticut Congregationalists Samuel Wales and Joseph Lathrop also trumpeted the American analogy to Israel of the Exodus ([32], pp. 776, 839, 869). Congressman Elias Boudinot even made the same parallel ten years after he served as President of the Continental Congress ([36], p. xxx). Samuel Cooper used another biblical analogy and compared British tyranny to the Babylonian tyranny over the Jews ([32], p. 631).

Another significant parallel for ministers during the lead-up to and war of the Revolution was Rehoboam, who oppressed the Israelites with corvee labor and taxes against their consent, prompting a rebellion that was sanctioned by Yahweh’s prophet (1 Kgs 12:1–24). It was an appropriate comparison for American preachers, with King George playing Rehoboam and the Americans playing the justified, breakaway northern tribes. Baptist radical John Allen preached the analogy with the fervor of Patrick Henry ([32], pp. 317, 321, 323). Keteltas and New York’s A Moderate Whig also employed it ([32], pp. 589–90, 722–24). In 1781 Massachusetts Congregationalist Henry Cumings used the Joseph, Exodus, and Rehoboam analogies, and then he added the Esther story to the mix ([32], pp. 663–71). Massachusetts minister Oliver Noble had used the Esther model in 1775, casting Lord North as the conspiratorial and bloodthirsty Haman ([37], p. 127).

Samuel Sherwood’s 1776 sermon, *The Church’s Flight into the Wilderness* used the same analogy of the Exodus, but identified the emergent Israel as the American church. Sherwood’s message was primarily based on Revelation 12 and was one of the best representatives of American millennialism ([32], pp. 494, 507–8). Not only was America the new Israel, but its church would inaugurate the new millennium.

Back in Britain, those ministers who opposed the Revolution argued the Bible from the other direction. Methodist John Fletcher, for example, preached against the revolution in 1776 in *The Bible and the Sword*. He described the colonists as the Benjamite “sons of Belial” that raped and murdered the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19. The British were as justified in stamping out the American rebellion as were the Israelites in crushing the Benjamites ([32], p. 570).

American ministers also inveighed against Britain’s professional armies from the pulpit. At the same time they realized that to defend themselves against Great Britain, the colonial militias would have to unify against Britain’s proficient, professional soldiers. Questions regarding professional armies *vs.* militias had emerged centuries before. The English scholar John Colet (1467–1519) used the Bible to argue against the militarism of professional soldiering, and he was followed by Thomas More (1478–1535) ([38], p. 16). James Harrington (1611–1677) later addressed the question from his perspective as a republican theorist, citing the examples of both the Israelite and Roman militias as models in his *Oceana* ([16], pp. 213–17). His military mentality was then applied to 18th-century concerns by others, such as John Trenchard (1662–1695) and Thomas Gordon (1691–1750), who used these models to articulate the “radical Whig” sentiment against standing armies ([16], pp. xix–xx). By the early 18th century, their works had begun to define the American preference for militias over professional armies ([38], p. 196).

One biblical reference used by American pastors to exhort colonial citizen-soldiers to unite in defense of the patriot cause was the obscure phrase “curse of Meroz”. The phrase is from Judges 5:22 and describes those Israelite tribes that did not come to the aid of their oppressed brethren. The Song of Deborah inveighs, “Curse Meroz...Utterly curse its inhabitants; Because they did not come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the warriors.” A Moderate Whig enjoined the colonists to defend their joint liberties and come to each other’s rescue, lest they suffer the curse. His lengthy *Defensive Arms Vindicated* focuses on the unity Israel needed to maintain in the anarchic world of the ancient Near East. Colonists should take heed to the military lessons of ancient Israel in the midst of their own geopolitical crisis ([32], pp. 715–70).

George Duffield had personally experienced the wrath of British armies early in his career as minister at Pine Street Church in Philadelphia. His church was locked against him when he came to preach, so he forced the doors and held service anyway, prompting the arrival of a British magistrate, who was physically ejected. A riot ensued and Duffield was jailed. When the Continental Congress was in Philadelphia, he served as its chaplain ([32], p. 772). Duffield’s 1783 sermon celebrated the peace after America’s victory, but it was nonetheless filled with injunctions for military readiness and American unity. Israel’s citizen-soldiers had conquered Canaan as America had conquered Britain. The curse of Meroz applied to those who had not participated in America’s righteous cause ([32], pp. 779–86).

The comparison to the Hebraic Republic’s military institutions was appropriate. Like most pastoral societies of the ancient world, once Israel had settled in Palestine, its economy was primarily agricultural. However, its covenant placed sovereignty in the hands of these farmers, and not pharaohs, military aristocracies, or other hierarchical schemes. The covenant relied on the idealized virtue of the average, smallholding farmer-citizen to hold the ancient republic together. They participated in the popular assemblies, but more important was their participation as part-time soldiers. Israel relied on its subsistence-farming militias until midway through the United Monarchy with the rise of the royal, professional army, known in scripture as the “mighty men” (2 Sm 23:8–39; 1 Chr 11:10–47). American pastors reveled in the parallel and were eager to continue its application for the new American constitutions. As these examples illustrate, the American cause was nearing a victorious conclusion, so pastors had begun shifting their focus to how the Old Testament should inform the new republic.

#### 4. America’s Hebraic Constitution

The Hebraic Republic was just as valuable in the creation of the American order after the revolution. Pastors were already eager to use the Hebraic Republic when state constitutions were formulated during the war. As the debates regarding Massachusetts’ new form of government were

concluding in 1780, Simeon Howard preached an election sermon before the Council and House of Representatives. He counseled the people and their representatives to remember the frame of government established by Jethro, Moses, and the divine legislator. He opened his sermon by appealing to the genius of the Jewish “constitution” and its “code of laws” before elaborating with his own counsels ([33], pp. 360–61).

Later that year Samuel Cooper preached before John Hancock and the Massachusetts House of Representatives on the commencement of the Massachusetts Constitution. Cooper went into great detail regarding the Hebraic Republic, explaining:

The form of government originally established in the Hebrew nation by a charter from heaven, was that of a free republic, over which God himself, in peculiar favour to that people, was pleased to preside. It consisted 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. ([18], p. 634).

Cooper continued with a history of Israel—from its triumphs under Moses and Joshua to the loss of its republican “civil constitution” under the kings ([32], p. 636). His purpose was to remind his audience how Israel lost this perfect balance of the three pure forms of government. They should not allow the same fate to befall them.

Cooper’s message before the governor and representatives of the people on the day of their own constitution’s commencement was remarkable proof that evangelical applications of the Bible to current events and politics had wide appeal. The people of Massachusetts, heirs of Winthrop and the Pilgrims, were now writing a new page within the larger tale of Protestant republicanism. They had applied the Hebraic Republic’s lessons to their own particular constitution as a model for the world to see. This would indeed be the case because Cooper’s sermon was so popular that it was translated into Dutch ([32], p. 628).

Connecticut pastor and president of Yale, Ezra Stiles, offered a similar election sermon, *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honour*, in 1783 before Governor Trumbull. His epic, 100-page sermon opened with a passage from Deuteronomy and an appeal to Moses’ political and historical genius. He briefly traced the rise and fall of the Hebrew commonwealth before reminding his audience that even when the Israelite polity had been destroyed, a remnant was preserved. In millennial ecstasy he then proclaimed that America was itself descended from this remnant, and he would provide “a discourse upon the political welfare of God’s American Israel” ([18], pp. 82–83). America’s chief accomplishment for all men to behold was that it had conquered monarchy and purified republicanism ([18], p. 63). The winding sermon continued to opine about America’s new chosen glory, both in the world and for the world. Through America God would not only provide another light to the nations on par with Israel, but ultimately perhaps bring about the conversion of the entire world ([18], p. 92).

Five years later Elizur Goodrich preached before the Connecticut General Assembly on the eve of the Philadelphia Convention in 1787. Goodrich inclined toward millennialism as well but was theoretically less critical of monarchy than Stiles, for there could be no greater inspiration for the American governments than Israel’s ancient constitutional monarchy. The “Hebrew Empire” was made strong by a king seated in Jerusalem who was subordinate to the people. He describes the Jewish polity as “all the tribes of Israel...a holy nation and commonwealth, under Jehovah their king and their God” ([32], p. 913). Drawing on this description, he saw America’s future as bright as the enthroned constitutional monarchy of ancient Jerusalem, saying:

We have also a Jerusalem, adorned with brighter glories of divine grace, and with greater beauties of holiness than were ever displayed, in the most august solemnities of the Hebrew-temple-worship, and presents, to our devout admiration, gratitude and praise, more excellent means of religion and virtue, peace and happiness, than ever called the attention of the assembled tribes of Israel. We enjoy all the privileges of a free government, the blessings of the gospel of peace, and the honours of the church of God. This is our Jerusalem. ([32], pp. 913–14).

As Americans looked to the possibility of a new federal constitution, ministers were equally enthusiastic in applying the Hebraic Republic. This should be no surprise given their references in constitutional literature from the time. Lutz categorized political literature from 1760 to 1805, finding that the Bible predominated at 34%, with Enlightenment (22%), Whig (18%), common law (11%), classical (9%), and other (6%) references following ([34], pp. 140–41).

Presbyterian minister John Witherspoon was a President of Princeton University and Signer of the Declaration. He used the biblical covenant model to advocate federalism over incorporation in the new national system. He believed local communities, and not individuals, were the fundamental building blocks of society. Witherspoon represented the American Whig view that “thought preserving local communities more important than having a legislature that reflected the community in detail and was supreme” ([34], p. 130). This notion, which is increasingly obsolete among modern republicans, was historically grounded in the federal covenant seen in Israel’s pastoral republic.

Congregationalist Samuel Langdon was a President of Harvard during the Revolution, where he staunchly advocated for the Revolution. He was a political Whig and a close friend of Samuel Adams. In 1788 he played a key role in New Hampshire’s ratification of the constitution. His election sermon, *The Republic of the Israelites an Example to the United States*, was preached before the General Court at Concord. Like Stiles, Langdon opened with a passage from Deuteronomy and a description of the “civil polity” and “constitution” of ancient Israel. With its checks and balances, rule of law, and sovereignty in the people, the Israelite government, he exclaimed, “was a proper republic”. Like A Moderate Whig and Duffield, he saw a close link between Israel’s republicanism and citizen armies. And like Witherspoon, he argued that the Hebraic Republic should guide considerations of America’s own constitution, as his sermon title implies. Israel’s ancient federalism, republicanism, and militia system were proof that America’s constitutional similarities in these matters were just and righteous. Unlike the Israelites, he exhorted, the United States must not depart from these principles and fall prey to corruption, unrighteousness, tyranny, and foreign captivity ([32], pp. 942–67).

Universalist clergyman Elhanan Winchester made an even more elaborate comparison to the Exodus on the anniversary of the Spanish Armada, the Glorious Revolution, and the new American constitution in 1788. All were fitting Anglo-American parallels to Israel’s freedom from Egyptian tyranny ([32], pp. 973–1000). The fact that sermons such as these spoke to broader global events and were published widely outside the colonies demonstrated the maturation of American conceptions of the Hebraic Republic. The travails of American evangelicals during the Revolution and the birth of a new American republic allowed pastors the opportunity to provide their own models to sympathetic adherents in the Netherlands and Britain.

By 1789 Americans had transformed the manner in which the Western world was using the Hebraic Republic. They had inherited the model from Protestantism, especially republican authors publishing in the Dutch Republic and Britain, but over the course of the two centuries from Jamestown to the Federal Constitution the model had been applied and elaborated on in unanticipated ways. Pilgrims and Puritans saw America as a new wilderness that could be transformed into a new promised land. Evangelicals following the Great Awakening used the Israelite polity as an example of communal piety and the judgment that would follow if Americans strayed from God’s righteous laws like the Israelites had. Evangelicals during the Revolutionary period were inspired by Israel’s Egyptian bondage and Exodus. They saw the millennial possibilities that lay on the horizon if America could unshackle themselves from the British pharaoh and accept the grace and power of a republican God

that believed in their liberty as he believed in the liberty of the Israelites. The Americans that emerged victorious then once again appealed to the Hebraic Republic. As it had inspired, chastised, and consoled, it would now provide a model for glorious new governments that would bring about a new age for the world.

Despite its early prevalence Americans, including many evangelicals, would eventually abandon the Hebraic Republic as a model in the 19th and 20th centuries. The recent legal battles regarding that memorable aspect of the ancient republic—the 10 Commandments—occasionally reference this tradition, but most have forgotten the power of the Decalogue and the polity that surrounded it had over the minds of early Americans. Recalling this legacy is unlikely to solve the debate. For some, it will only remind them of a peculiar theology applied in particular ways that should be abandoned. For others, it will inspire efforts to reanimate the Hebraic Republic anew so that the global millennial age can finally begin.

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