

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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## The *Sine Qua Non* of Enduring Freedom by John W. Robbins

*Editor's note: This essay first appeared in A Man of Principle: Essays in Honor of Hans F. Sennholz, the Festschrift for Dr. Robbins' Economics professor at Grove City College, which Dr. Robbins co-edited in 1992. It has since been published in Dr. Robbins' Freedom and Capitalism: Essays on Christian Politics and Economics (The Trinity Foundation, 2006).*

*Dr. Robbins was blessed by the Lord to see the logical implications of the policies of our federal government long before others saw where we were heading and now are. The Bible gives us all we need to know for life and godliness, which includes the limits on governments. If we wish to see God bless America with freedom again, then the church needs to (1) repent of rejecting the Bible as its only source of truth and authority, (2) read it, (3) believe it, and (4) live according to it.*

Hans Sennholz is a greater defender of freedom and free enterprise than most of his teachers, peers, and students. The reason is simple, though little mentioned in polite society: A logically competent defense of a free society requires divinely revealed information; all other defenses fail. Sennholz, almost alone among eminent free enterprise economists, rests his defense of a free society on revelation.

### Failed Defenses

There are four principal methods of defending a free society: economics, Natural Law, Utilitarianism, and Biblical revelation. In this essay, I shall briefly point out some of the fallacies in the first three defenses, beginning with economics.

*Economics.* A competent defense of freedom and free enterprise cannot rest on Austrian economics, Chicagoan economics, Keynesian economics, or any other body of

economic theory. The reason is quite simple: *Wertfreiheit*. Economics, as a value-free science, simply is not and cannot be a source of values. Like physics, economics describes (or purports to describe) what is, not what ought to be. An economist *qua* economist, even (or especially) if he be the purest Austrian, cannot logically say that free markets, wealth, and increasing productivity are good, or that price controls, shortages, and unemployment are bad; at best he can only point out the consequences of price controls and free markets. An Austrian economist cannot logically say that John Maynard Keynes was wrong in preferring the short run to the long run. An economist cannot even say that economics is good. Economics can establish no values, including its own. An economist, *qua* economist, can make no ethical statements whatever. He can, however, give technical advice; and the better the economist, the better the advice. If a ruler wishes to impoverish a people, he would do well to listen to his Austrian advisers: They would be able to advise him how best to do it.

*Utilitarianism.* Since economics is a descriptive science, those interested in defending a free society must find their means of defense elsewhere. Ludwig von Mises chose Utilitarianism. It was an odd choice for a refugee from totalitarianism, for if Utilitarianism could justify any political regime, it would surely be totalitarianism. The "greatest good of the greatest number" is a slogan that has been used to justify all sorts of (at the time) politically correct murders and depredations in the twentieth century. But Utilitarianism, though it purports to offer ethical guidance, is an ethical failure. It can provide no ethical guidance, for the calculations of pains and pleasures that it requires are

simply impossible.<sup>1</sup> Utilitarianism commits the naturalistic fallacy as well, for the fact that men are motivated to act by pain and pleasure does not imply that they ought to be.

*Natural Law.* Other students of Mises have chosen some form of natural law theory as the basis for their defense of a free society. But natural law, whether in its Aristotelian, Stoic, Thomistic, or Lockean form, rests on a logical blunder of the first order, first pointed out by David Hume: Natural law theory violates the rule that conclusions of arguments can contain no more than the premises.

John Locke unwittingly illustrated the naturalistic fallacy when he wrote that persons in the state of nature, “being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions.”<sup>2</sup> If the premises of an argument are descriptive (as in Locke’s statement), the conclusion must also be descriptive. *Ought* cannot be derived from *is*. The Marquis de Sade illustrated what happens when one tries to base ethics on nature. It is not surprising that natural law has been used by various natural lawyers to reach various conclusions on such issues as the rights of women, children, and animals; slavery, abortion, infanticide, and marriage. Natural law, being unwritten, is very much a wax nose that can be used to “justify” any conclusion one prefers.<sup>3</sup> Actually, of course, it justifies no action and offers no ethical guidance. Natural law is not a logically competent defense of a free society.

### A Logically Competent Defense

In contrast to his secular colleagues, Sennholz rests his defense of a free society on information revealed by God. In that, he has displayed far more perspicacity than most other contemporary apologists for freedom.

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<sup>1</sup> See Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian View of Men and Things* (The Trinity Foundation); *Religion, Reason and Revelation* (The Trinity Foundation); and *Thales to Dewey: A History of Philosophy* (The Trinity Foundation) for some destructive analyses of Utilitarianism and other ethical systems. It is remarkable that Ludwig von Mises, the economic genius who pointed out the impossibility of economic calculation under socialism, accepted Utilitarianism and the possibility of hedonic calculation. Utilitarian calculation is even more absurd than socialist economic calculation.

<sup>2</sup> *Two Treatises of Government*, Peter Laslett, editor, 31. Locke tries to save his argument by appealing to Scripture. Modern natural lawyers generally make no such attempt.

<sup>3</sup> The recent revival of natural law theory is more than remarkable; not only does it fly in the face of David Hume and logic, it ignores Charles Darwin and biology as well. If one accepts some variety of the theory of evolution (as many natural lawyers do), one has adopted a view of nature that undermines natural law theory: Nature and nature’s laws are constantly changing.

In a 1987 book, *Debts and Deficits*, he wrote, “A [political and economic] reform...would have to restore the harmony of interests and repair moral standards. It would have to rebuild the economic order on the old foundation of the Eighth Commandment – Thou shalt not steal – and the Tenth – Thou shalt not covet anything that is thy neighbor’s.”<sup>4</sup> In a discussion of Social Security, he wrote: “When public assistance seems to be called for, the children of a retired worker should be given an opportunity to contribute to the support of their parents. As parents are responsible for their children, so are children responsible for their parents. No Social Security System should eradicate this moral law and Biblical Commandment.”<sup>5</sup>

Discussing the burden that AIDS is placing on government health and welfare programs, Sennholz has written: “In ages gone, when moral obligations meant conformity to the will of God, carriers of contagious diseases who knowingly and willingly infected other individuals, and thereby inflicted great suffering and early death on others, would have been treated as criminals, yea, even as murderers, and been promptly quarantined from the healthy community....”<sup>6</sup>

Sennholz uses Christ’s story of the Good Samaritan to make another point:

A helper and benefactor to the unfortunate and poor, the Good Samaritan binds the wounds, nurses the sick, and helps them get back on their feet. He *does not* call for government programs that make poverty a permanent social institution playing a central role in politics. He *does not* favor progressive income taxation, nor depend on poverty administrators consuming the lion’s share of the poverty budget, or poverty politicians enacting minimum wage laws, occupational licensing, and union power or privilege. To be a helper indeed is to lend a friendly hand to a needy person; it is personal effort and sacrifice.<sup>7</sup>

In one of his most recent works, *Three Economic Commandments*, Sennholz asserts that

Both economic systems [capitalism and socialism] rest on the foundation of an ethical order that provides answers to questions such as: Why and when is an economic act called “good” or “bad,” “right” or “wrong”? What standard of conduct is acceptable and commendable or distasteful and repugnant? What is virtue in economic life?

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<sup>4</sup> Hans F. Sennholz, *Debts and Deficits*, 164; see also page 44.

<sup>5</sup> Sennholz, 166.

<sup>6</sup> Sennholz, 170.

<sup>7</sup> Sennholz, 44-45.

The market order or capitalism finds its answers in the Judeo-Christian code of morality. Private ownership in production is squarely based on the Ten Commandments. It obviously rests on the Eighth Commandment: Thou shalt not steal. The private-ownership system also builds on the solid foundation of the Sixth Commandment: Thou shalt not kill, which includes every form of coercion and violence.... To freely exchange goods and services, the contracting parties must not deceive each other. They must not bear false witness, which is the Ninth Commandment of the Decalogue.<sup>8</sup>

These quotations from Sennholz's writings – and there are many more – clearly teach that it is information revealed in the Bible that forms the basis for capitalism and freedom. It is the purpose of this essay to summarize some of the Biblical information on the nature, power, and limits of government; specifically, what role government should play in money, banking, and foreign affairs.

### **The Hebrew Republic**

The Old Testament, in particular the book of *1 Samuel*, is the oldest textbook in political freedom. Absent from its pages are the communism of Plato, the fascism of Aristotle, and the democratic totalitarianism of Rousseau. Written about 1000 BC, the book of *1 Samuel* may be the first handbook in republican political theory.

God established a model government in ancient Israel, and it is the only government for which he gave explicit rules. While many of those rules applied solely to ancient Israel – cities of refuge, for example – others apply to all governments. The judicial laws of Israel expired with that nation, but it is possible to discern general principles in the Old Testament laws that may be applied to modern governments.

As for the form of government, God established a republic in Israel. The nation was divided into twelve tribes, much as the United States is divided into fifty states. Each tribe had its own territory and border; each had its own local government; and the nation as a whole had a national government. There was no king; there was no powerful central government. The government consisted mostly of judges; there was no legislature to create new laws each year, only judges to settle disputes in accord with the laws that God had already given.<sup>9</sup> There was no standing army. There was no military draft or national service. Education was not a function of government, but of parents, schools, and synagogue. Charity was handled privately. Taxes were extremely

low. Money – gold and silver – was provided by private merchants, not by the government.

The remarkable thing about this political arrangement is that it apparently was unique in ancient times, at least in the Middle East. This very uniqueness became an objection to it during the time of the prophet Samuel. The people of Israel rebelled against their model government. The story is told in *1 Samuel* 8:1-18:

Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba.

But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make for us a king to judge us like all the nations."

But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.... Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them."

So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who asked him for a king. And he said, "This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots. He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties; he will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.

"He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants. And he will take your menservants and your maidservants and your finest young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the Lord will not hear you in that day."

<sup>8</sup> Sennholz, *Three Economic Commandments*, 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> Compare Bruno Leoni, *Freedom and the Law*.

Despite this detailed and explicit warning from God, the people of Israel persisted in their demand to have a king “like all the nations.” So God instructed Samuel to give them what they wanted. In Augustinian terms, big government is both the result of, and the punishment for, sin.

God’s warning against monarchy makes it clear that God despises all earthly monarchies: The people of Israel rejected God as their invisible king in favor of a visible, human king. This account in *1 Samuel* makes it clear that human kings, powerful governments, are *ersatz* gods; they are idols of a wayward people. Subsequent verses in *1 Samuel* repeat God’s disapproval of monarchy:

But you have today rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations, and you have said to him, “No, but set a king over us!” (10:19). “Is today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the Lord, and he will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking a king for yourselves.” So Samuel called to the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day.... And all the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves” [12:17-19].

But God’s warning was directed at more than monarchy: It is a warning against big government generally, a warning of what happens when God’s model government, a republic of limited powers, is rejected. Rather than the governors being servants of the people, the people become servants of the governors. There is an echo of *1 Samuel* in the New Testament:

But there was also rivalry among them [Christ’s disciples] as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves” [Luke 22:24-26].

The American notion that government ought to be the servant of the people, not exercise dominion over them, may be traced directly to *1 Samuel* 8 and *Luke* 22.

## **Taking**

In the warning God gives the Israelites through the prophet Samuel he uses the phrase “he will take” six

times. The monarchy, the strong central government demanded by the people, will be a tyrannical government. The king will take:

...their sons and their daughters; their best fields, vineyards and olive groves; a tenth of their grain and vintage; their menservants, their maidservants, their finest young men and their donkeys; a tenth of their sheep; and the people themselves to be his servants.

Through this warning we can understand more clearly what the Hebrew republic was like, for none of the evils about which God warned the Israelites characterized the republic. *First Samuel* is the earliest historical account that contains such a detailed analysis of the overweening powers of big government and explains the powers of such a government as the result of a defection from God and from the divinely revealed model government.

Notice that the people of Israel demanded a change in the form of their government because of corruption among Samuel’s sons, whom Samuel had unwisely installed as judges. Rather than eliminating the corrupt officials, as they ought to have done, they blamed the system of government itself and exchanged their unique republic for the pagan system of monarchy.

The king they demanded would take their sons for himself, for his chariots, to run before his chariots, to be captains in his armies, and to work for him growing food and making weapons. The primary difference between the Hebrew republic and the later monarchy was what we have come to call a military-industrial complex. The growth of this establishment would begin with a draft and national service, for the king would need enormous quantities of cheap labor to sustain his war machine.

The draftees would be the servants of the king. Some would work closely with him; others would be part of his personal entourage and palace guard. A standing army would be established for the first time – there would be captains of thousands and captains of fifties. Chariots, which at that time were offensive weapons, would be added for the first time to Israel’s defense forces. Other draftees would work to support this military machine, tending the crops in the fields the king had taken from the people, reaping the harvests for the army and the bureaucracy, and making weapons of war and equipment for the king’s chariots.

The first warning that God gives to the Israelites who were demanding a king is a warning against the militarism of the king. Militarism is not an exclusive characteristic of monarchies, but it is a trait of all large governments, whether they be called monarchies, people’s democracies, or welfare states. The military draft, a standing army, weapons factories, a large government bureaucracy, large government farms – all

these were absent from the Hebrew republic, and all were disapproved by God.

But this military-agricultural-industrial complex was merely the first of the oppressions the king would impose on the people. He would compel their sons to serve him, and he would take their daughters as well. They would feed his troops, his bureaucracy, his weapons makers, and his own appetites: "He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers." The taking of both sons and daughters for the king's service would be the monarchy's version of national service.

Forced labor, however, would not be enough to support the new central government. There are three factors of production, and the new king would take all of them: labor, land, and capital – land and capital in the form of fields, vineyards, groves, and grain. Eminent domain, the right of the ruler to take private property for public use, became, for the first time, a policy of the government of ancient Israel.

After the king had taken all this property from the people of Israel he would give it to his supporters: "He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants" (*1 Samuel* 8:15). Today we might call such a program a transfer or entitlement program, redistributing the wealth, or, echoing Bastiat, legalized theft. The last phrase is the most accurate, for God regarded these actions of the king as violations of the Eighth Commandment, "You shall not steal."

But the king, God warns, will take more. In addition to their children, land, and capital, he will take their servants, their servants' children, and even their farm animals "and put them to his work." When this massive program of compulsory labor and taxation is finally in place, God continues, "You will be his servants. And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the Lord will not hear you in that day." The kind of government that God had created for ancient Israel, a government in which the governors were the servants of the governed, would be changed into a pagan form of government in which the rulers would exercise dominion over the people.

In his detailed warning to the ancient Israelites God explains, by way of contrast, the kind of things governors are not supposed to do. Rulers exceed their authority if they:

1. Use compulsory labor, either for their armies, bureaucracies, or households.
2. Establish standing armies.
3. Establish government production facilities.
4. Redistribute property.
5. Impose taxes of ten percent or more.
6. Nationalize the means of production.

From this warning we can see how far the United States has moved from the Biblical model: Our taxes are far higher than ten percent; they are closer to forty percent. Our government, although it is not drafting anyone at the moment, is registering young men for the draft, and it asserts its right to compel them to serve at any time. We have an enormous standing army of more than 2.6 million. There is an even larger federal bureaucracy, to say nothing of the state bureaucracies. Altogether, nearly twenty million people work for the local, state, and federal governments. The federal government owns factories, power plants, banks, and one-third of the land in the United States. More than half of the federal budget consists of transfer programs by which the government takes property from taxpayers and gives it to tax consumers. Our kind of government, in brief, is the one about which God warned the ancient Israelites.

### **The Hebrew Constitution**

While *1 Samuel* 8 establishes the limits of governmental power in a negative way by warning against the consequences of rejecting a republic and establishing a monarchy, *Exodus* 21-23 and some other important passages establish the limits of governmental power in another way, by telling rulers what they are permitted and required to do. As one examines these chapters, one is struck by the preponderance of laws about domestic and internal affairs. There are laws about murder, accidental killing, kidnapping, assaulting and cursing one's parents, negligence, stealing, trespass, seduction and rape, witchcraft, idolatry, lying, bribery, and the treatment of foreigners. There is little mention of either foreign or commercial relations.

This dearth of information is in itself important. It means, first of all, that the Hebrew republic was to be primarily concerned with its own affairs, not with either economic or foreign interventionism. It was supposed to mind its own business. Its business was to see that justice was done within its own borders. The judges of the republic were not to be concerned with establishing similar governments elsewhere, even in neighboring states, nor with rectifying the enormous injustices that must have occurred daily in the pagan nations that surrounded the republic. The borders of Israel were the limits of the jurisdiction of the republic. Even within those borders, government was not to concern itself with commercial regulations; its primary interest in commerce was to punish fraudulent weights and measures.

### **The State and Money**

In his book *Honest Money, The Biblical Blueprint for Money and Banking*, Gary North makes an excellent point: "There is nothing in the Bible that indicates that

gold and silver became money metals because Abraham, Moses, David, or any other political leader announced one afternoon: ‘From now on, gold is money!’...the State didn’t create money.’<sup>10</sup> This is quite true. The Bible is the oldest and most reliable history book we have, and there is nothing in it to indicate that the State originally created money. Rather, the evidence is that money originated in the market, when merchants offered their own coins and weights of metal in trade.

Those who think that the use of gold or silver as money evolved relatively late in human history might learn something from the history of Abraham. About two thousand years before Christ, he paid for a field by weighing out 400 shekels of silver. The account is given in *Genesis* 23.<sup>11</sup>

*Honesty.* From this example of Abraham we see that money in the Bible is a weight of metal. *Talents* were certain weights of silver. Now this historical fact does not require modern money to be a weight of silver or even of metal. But it does lead to another major teaching of the Bible on money: If money consists of weights, and throughout history it usually has, then the money must be full-bodied; less than honest weight constitutes fraud. There are several passages on this point in the Bible:

You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt [*Leviticus* 19:35-36].

The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight [*Proverbs* 11:1].

The Lord detests differing weights, and dishonest scales do not please him [*Proverbs* 20:23].

Do not have two differing weights in your bag – one heavy, one light. Do not have two differing measures in your house – one large, one small. You must have accurate and honest weights and measures, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you [*Deuteronomy* 25:13-15].

Any use of fraudulent weights was subject to the penalties imposed for theft: at least double restitution, with the ultimate penalty being required for recidivism. The dishonesty of fraudulent weights is a case of the broader principle that nothing is to be misrepresented.

*Fractional Reserves.* If modern money does not consist of weights of metal, and it need not, it must

nevertheless not misrepresent itself. The Biblical requirement is not for metal money and one hundred percent gold reserves, but for honesty. So long as private (not government) paper money is not misrepresented by its owners, it is clearly acceptable. Government paper money, on the other hand, even when backed by gold or silver, is always wrong, for government has no authority to print money.

*Retribution, not Regulation.* There is another principle besides honesty underlying these rules. It would seem that there were no regulatory police in ancient Israel; buyers and sellers and their agents were responsible for making sure that they were not being cheated, and if detected in fraud, a person was subject to stiff penalties. Biblical law follows the principle of punishing wrongdoers rather than trying to regulate everyone in the hope of preventing wrongdoing. That is why Paul writes in *Romans* 13 that the purpose of civil government is to punish evil-doers.

*Legal Tender.* Another thing that follows from the restricted Biblical role of government with regard to money and banking is the absence of legal tender laws. I wish to make clear what I mean by “legal tender,” since it seems to have at least two different meanings. Of course, if a government is to collect taxes or payments of any sort, it must specify acceptable forms of payment. This is one meaning of “legal tender.” In the early years of the American republic, this problem was solved by the government publishing a list of monies in which it would accept payment. It did not restrict payment to one form of money, but published a broad list of acceptable means of payment. The constitutionality of this form of legal tender was not challenged.

But there is another meaning of the phrase “legal tender”: Usually it means that a creditor is compelled to accept whatever the government has declared to be tender as payment for outstanding debts. Each Federal Reserve Note bears the words, “This note is legal tender for all debts public and private.” Those words mean that a private creditor must accept them in payment for a debt. It makes little difference that the creditor may have a contract calling for payment in something else, for the courts do not, as a rule, order specific performance of contracts. Perhaps at one time they did. But today a creditor is compelled to accept the government paper as payment.

There is no warrant in the Bible for this sort of legal tender. Rather, the clear implication is that the parties to a contract may set the terms of the contract, so long as they are not illegal in themselves, and those terms must be obeyed. The Bible praises the man who makes a promise and keeps it, even though he might be injured by keeping it. It condemns the man who defaults on a deal, or seeks to substitute something of lesser value for

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<sup>10</sup> Gary North, *Honest Money, The Biblical Blueprint for Money and Banking*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> It is bizarre but not surprising that secular economists rely on fables about the origin of money while ignoring a reliable history book like the Bible.

that which he promised to deliver. Legal tender laws are an institutionalized form of defaulting on debts.

*Mammon.* Finally, there is another aspect of money and the Bible that we ought to consider: money as mammon. Everyone knows that the Bible strongly condemns mammon, and many people equate mammon with money. The two, however, are not the same. Mammon is money worshiped. That is why Christ said, “You cannot serve God and mammon.” Mammon is money become an idol, and even beneficial things can become instruments of destruction if they are regarded more highly than they ought to be. The Bible condemns all forms of idolatry, including the idolatry of money. Ayn Rand did not understand this when she wrote her books, but perhaps she has a better understanding of it now.

This Biblical view of money and banking is reflected in Dr. Sennholz’s 1986 book, *Money and Freedom*, in which he advocates the repeal of compulsory tender laws and concludes:

Sound money and free banking are not impossible; they are merely illegal. That is why money must be deregulated.... In freedom, the money and banking industry can create sound and honest currencies, just as other free industries can provide efficient and reliable products.<sup>12</sup>

### **The State and Foreign Policy**

Any adequate discussion of the foreign policy of ancient Israel must deal with several subjects: treaties, alliances, diplomacy, colonialism, espionage, and war. I shall discuss each of these briefly.

*Treaties.* In *Exodus* 23:20-33 there is an explicit command to Israel not to make treaties with the nations of Canaan: “You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods” (verse 32). God intended to destroy those nations, and he did not want Israel fraternizing with them. The command does not imply that all treaties are wrong, only that it was wrong for Israel to make treaties with the nations God was about to destroy. It was a command intended only for ancient Israel.

When treaties are made, however, they are to be kept, even if one is tricked into making the agreement. A treaty negotiated by Joshua with the Gibeonites resulted from his failure to follow God’s instruction (“The men of Israel...did not ask counsel of the Lord,” *Joshua* 9:14), and Joshua was deceived by the clever Gibeonites. Nevertheless, because the Israelites had sworn an oath, they were bound to keep it:

But the children of Israel did not attack them [the Gibeonites] because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel. And

all the congregation murmured against the rulers. Then all the rulers said to all the congregation, “We have sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel; now therefore we may not touch them” [*Joshua* 9:18-19].

*Alliances.* God’s command to ancient Israel not to make treaties with its neighbors does, however, raise the question of the legitimacy of making treaties and forming alliances. On alliances the Bible seems to speak quite clearly:

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord.... Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh and not spirit. When the Lord stretches out his hand, both he who helps will fall, and he who is helped will fall down; they all will perish together [*Isaiah* 31:1, 3].

This seems to be a general condemnation of alliances and of trust in armies and weapons. The Bible disapproves of political and military alliances because they are acts of faith in weapons and soldiers, and not in God; and it discourages treaties because they are serious agreements that must be performed.

*Diplomacy.* The limitation on government-to-government contact in the Bible is so restrictive that embassies and permanent diplomatic missions were not authorized for the Hebrew republic. Rather, when the necessity arose, an emissary was dispatched for the specific purpose of carrying a message or discussing a problem. For example, after the Israelites had escaped from Egypt, Moses sent out emissaries to the King of Edom asking permission to pass through Edom: “Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the king’s highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory” (*Numbers* 20:17). The King of Edom refused Moses’ request, and “Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory; so Israel turned away from him” (verse 21).

There are two things that ought to be noticed about this account: the use of emissaries for specific and unavoidable negotiations, and the refusal of Moses as the leader of God’s chosen people to cross the border of Edom without the Edomites’ permission.

Even when ancient Israel was a monarchy, it seems that it had no ambassadors or embassies abroad: “Now Hiram King of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, because he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father, for Hiram had always loved David. Then Solomon sent word to Hiram” (*1 Kings* 5: 1-2).

<sup>12</sup> Hans F. Sennholz, *Money and Freedom*, 83.

Even between friends, Hiram and David, there apparently were no permanent ambassadors. King Hiram had helped David build his house, but he sent messengers to Solomon. There were no permanent ambassadors even under the monarchy.

No provision was made for resident ambassadors and embassies in the model government, the Hebrew republic; and even the monarchy, apparently, did not enlarge its meddling in foreign affairs to the point of sending and receiving permanent representatives.

*Espionage.* A related foreign policy question is the matter of spies, for perhaps the predominant function of embassies today (and perhaps whenever they have been used) is espionage. Ancient Israel used spies, but only during war and for short periods of time. Just as there was no standing army, so there were no standing armies of spies and diplomats. God commanded Moses to “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan,” one from each tribe (*Numbers* 13:2). Ten of the spies were worthless; two were useful. I suspect the same ratio has always held. Moses also sent spies to Jazer (*Numbers* 21:32), a Canaanite city. Joshua sent two spies to Jericho (*Joshua* 2:1).

Some of this spying was commanded by God, and perhaps all of it was, but we are not told that all of it was done at God’s express command. But spying was used exclusively during wartime. Spying on other nations was not a normal, peacetime practice of either the Hebrew republic or the monarchy. It seems clear that spying on one’s neighboring governments during peacetime, even more than maintaining embassies that harbor spies, is a form of prohibited foreign intervention. It can hardly be argued that God’s command to Moses justifies the regular use of spies, for the command was very specific: Spy out the land of Canaan. Espionage, except during wartime, is not a proper function of government.

*Colonialism.* In the nineteenth century the phrase “white man’s burden” was used to justify the colonial policies of the European nations. Because of his superior culture, intelligence, race, and learning, so the argument went, the white man has the burden of ruling the lesser breeds. Ancient Israel, by contrast, had no burden to rule over the benighted nations of the world. God’s foreign policy, even when he was establishing a political state in the Middle East, was very limited in scope.

This was as it had to be: A government of limited domestic powers must also be a government of limited international powers. The proper concerns of foreign policy cannot exceed the proper concerns of government in general: the safety and freedom of the territory and people within its borders. Israel, though it was the only nation specially chosen by God, had no authority to liberate Egypt from the Pharaohs. If ancient Israel did not have such authority, even though it had specific commands from God and occupied a unique place in

human history, far less does any modern nation have such authority.

*War.* God commanded the ancient Israelites at different times both to refrain from war as well as to attack certain nations. In *Deuteronomy* 2:5 God says, “Do not meddle with them [the children of Esau who lived in Seir], for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as one footstep.... You shall buy food from them with money, that you may eat; and you shall also buy water from them with money, that you may drink.... Do not harass Moab, nor contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land” (verses 5, 6, 9). Continuing commercial relations are not forbidden, but continuing military and political relations are. Borders were instituted for the purpose of separating rulers, not peoples, from each other.

From all these considerations it is clear that the people, not the governors, play the major role in foreign relations. The governors are to settle disputes by negotiation, if possible, and by war if necessary and justifiable. Free trade and travel between nations is the rule. The absence of both resident ambassadors and spies is the norm.

In foreign policy, the role of government in ancient Israel was not to make the world, or even the Middle East, safe for theocracy. The nation was simply to occupy the land that God had given them. Had God not commanded them to do so, in specific detail, they would have had no authority to act even as they did.

## **Conclusion**

It is not to Plato’s *Republic* nor to Aristotle’s *Politics*, not to the Greek city-states nor the City and Empire of Rome, and not to the Code of Hammurabi or Solon that we must look for a model of good government and a competent defense of a free society, but to the Bible and the Hebrew republic. Because the Bible is divinely revealed information, it furnishes us with the principles we need to defend a free society.

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