

The Danville New
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“A July 4th Tribute”
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This Independence Day let's listen to an 18th century revolutionary voice, whose appeal for American independence drew from an Old Testament passage. The people of Israel felt insecure. They felt threatened by the bullying power of their neighbor nations. They felt their decentralized system of government served by judges was inadequate, especially when the likely successors to their current judge, Samuel, were his irreligious, scoundrel sons. Israel clamored for security over liberty. So the people demanded a king. They wanted someone to go out and fight their battles.

We may grumble how we resent being told what to do, but we do like being kept. At least then we have someone to blame for our problems, even if the price is corruption, favoritism, bribery, oppression. Let him fight our battles. That's a bad bargain.

Hold it now. Do kings fight our battles? History tells another story. Kings make us fight theirs. We die for them. Want proof? Putin. Through the prophet Samuel God warns how control by kings is a recipe for ruin. By embracing kings, saith the Lord, the people reject God's way. You want poverty? Let kings rule. You want your sons and daughters oppressed into slavery? Let kings rule. Despots, like kudzu, are an invasive specie.

God's problem with kings is that kings demand you serve the king – it's all about him, for kings only take. The Bible tells us so. God gives and gives. Why? So you can have a good life, raise your kids, love your spouse, take care of your neighbors, grow your crops, eat your crops, take care of farm or shop, what God intends to be enjoyed through good government – life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Yet, how persistent, pervasive, perverse our gonorrhoeal lust for kings. Why this senseless wanting kings to rescue us, regardless the cost, for the delusion of peace, prosperity, freedom? We can't stand instability. Feeling insecure, we sell our souls for vain boasts from the king that he will save us. The Hebrews viewed kings as an easy solution. Guess again. Name any absolute ruler in ancient history who hasn't been miserable for the people. We could name a few in modern history too. Thank God a majority of Americans believe despotism is stupid.

God's warning proved ruthlessly true. The kings of Israel were a miserable lot, ending up in misery, civil war, immorality, idolatry, weakness. No life. No liberty. No pursuit of happiness. Divided and divisive, Israel was readily conquered by brutal kingdoms. The best of the bunch was King David despite him shunning his wife, despite his son revolting to dethrone daddy, despite him murdering his lover's husband, despite him pursuing vain power and glory. What made him Israel's favorite king? David came to learn the hard way that he was a miserable king and miserable sinner. He came to learn how much he needed faithfulness if he truly was able to defend, protect, and care for his people the way he as servant was supposed to. Never, God warns, put your trust in princes. Kings, besides committing the folly of thinking themselves indispensable, demand you love them, or else.

Thomas Paine in “Common Sense,” his 1776 masterpiece appealing for Americans to reject British tyranny, based part of his reasoning on this Biblical passage from Samuel: “So neither can [monarchy]

be defended on the authority of scripture; for the will of the Almighty, as declared by Gideon and the prophet Samuel, expressly disapproves of government by kings.”

In his 1791 “Rights of Man,” Paine extolled the three essential attributes for rulers in a Republic: First, virtue – the willingness to subordinate selfish interest to the good of the whole; Second, equality – which encouraged not simply equal treatment before the law but also the absence of vast disparities of personal wealth; Third, independence – the ability to resist outside coercion.

Let’s remember why our forebears fought to establish our liberal democratic Republic. The Declaration of Independence lists twenty-seven reasons for revolution. Of these twenty-seven, how many are indictments against Britain’s tyrant king? Twenty-seven. Twenty-seven indictments detail King George III’s “long train of abuses and usurpations.” You might find them relevant.

This Independence Day, we’d do well to listen to a plain-spoken, sensible, patriotic, optimistic voice from the 18th Century. Today, we would do well to mark what Paine celebrated as exceptional about America: “For as in absolute governments the King is law, so in free countries the law ought to be King; and there ought to be no other.”