

NATIONAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ASSOCIATION



WAS ISRAEL A REPUBLIC?

This question must sound strange to the ears of every reader of the Bible; but it is the position taken by a certain party in our land, who, in their wondrous zeal for a religious government in the United States, actually assert that the government of Israel, instituted at Sinai, was a republic! The following from their organ, the *Christian Statesman*, may be taken as a sample of their utterances upon this point:—

“The nation of Israel was organized at mount Sinai, as ‘the custodians of the law, liberty, and religion of mankind.’ A republican form of government was given them. The three departments of government, — the legislative, executive, and judicial, were substantially represented in it. Moses, as the judge or president, was the chief executive officer. The seventy elders formed the congress of general government. The court of the gate or civil Sanhedrim was the arbiter of justice. The heads of the tribe and princes thereof constituted the tribal or State governments. It was a representative government. The people were sovereign. They elected their rulers to represent them in office.”

Such assertions are not only absurd, but a shameful perversion of Bible history, as the following statements will show:—

1. When Israel was called out of Egypt, the government under which they were led was a *theocracy*, pure and simple. And every one knows that a theocracy is the very opposite of a republic.

2. There was no legislative department in the government. A republic was well described by President Lincoln, as a government ‘of the people, by the people, and for the people.’ But no such government was instituted at Sinai, or at any other place or time, for Israel. Even Moses, the highest among them, was not a legislator; *Moses never made any laws*. He enforced that, and that only, which he received directly from the Lord.

3. The seventy elders were not legislators; they never made any laws; they did not constitute a “Congress” in any sense in which that word is used in a republic or in any representative government. The *Statesman* and its correspondents can make these assertions good only by pointing to the act by which they were constituted a legislative body,

or pointing to some law which they enacted. This they cannot do. But by their failure to do this, they will stand convicted of misrepresenting the Bible to serve the purpose of their worldly ambition. There is not in the land a Sunday-school scholar of intelligence and study, who does not know that God alone gave laws to Israel, which Moses and the seventy elders were to enforce and administer, with the explicit direction to add nothing to them, nor take anything from them.

4. The assertion that "the people were sovereign," is false even to an absurdity. They possessed no sovereignty in the government in any respect whatever. Neither the people, nor Moses, nor the seventy, were consulted in regard to the laws they were to obey, or to the penalties to be enforced. They entered into covenant with God to be his people and to obey him, but God conferred no legislative power upon any of them.

5. Although the government was a theocracy, under the immediate and sole direction of God, the religious and civil elements were kept distinct, the priests having no inheritance with the tribes, and all but those designated by the Lord as priests being ineligible to the priesthood. All religious rites being ordered by the Lord, the civil rulers had no authority to control them, or interfere in their performance. The prophets through whom the Lord directed the affairs of the Government, might or might not be priests. Sometimes this office was given to women. All was ordered of the Lord, and the people had no voice in any of these matters.

6. The people finally demanded a king, not to better their government, but to be as the nations around them. Though the Lord listened to their request, the thing displeased him. He gave them a king, but he reserved to himself the right to choose the king for them. Even in this they were not consulted. Saul was chosen of the Lord, and anointed before the people knew anything about him. He was rejected, — not by the people, but by the Lord, — and David was chosen and anointed in like manner, without the knowledge of the people. And the powers of the kings were so limited by the rules and laws which were given to them, that Israel was once sorely afflicted because king David presumed to take a census of the people without consulting the Lord.

And now, reader, we leave it to you to judge in this matter. Was there any semblance of a republic in the government of Israel, in any period of its history? Is not any one guilty of deception who would try to palm off such statements as those we have quoted, as historical truths of the Bible?

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