

Ezra Taft Benson

The Constitution, A Heavenly Banner

History is not an accident. Events are foreknown to God. His superintending influence is behind the actions of his righteous Children. Long before America was even discovered, the Lord was moving and shaping events that would lead to the coming forth of the remarkable form of government established by the Constitution. America had to be free and independent to fulfill this destiny... Though mortal eyes and minds cannot fathom the end from the beginning, God does.

The Lord Approved the Constitution

But we honor more than those who brought forth the Constitution. We honor the Lord who revealed it. God himself has borne witness to the fact that he is pleased with the final product of the work of these great patriots.

In a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith on August 6, 1833, the Savior admonished: "I, the Lord, justify you, and your brethren of my church, in befriending that law which is the constitutional law of the land" (D&C 98:6).

In the Kirtland Temple dedicatory prayer, given on March 27, 1836, the Lord directed the Prophet Joseph to say: "May those principles, which were so honorably and nobly defended, namely, the Constitution of our land, by our fathers, be established forever" (D&C 109:54).

A few years later, Joseph Smith, while unjustly incarcerated in a cold and depressing cell of Liberty Jail at Clay County, Missouri, frequently bore his testimony of the document's divinity: "The Constitution of the United States is a glorious standard; it is founded in the wisdom of God. It is a heavenly banner" (HC 3:304).

....It is now two hundred years since the Constitution was written. Have we been wise beneficiaries of the gift entrusted to us? Have we valued and protected the principles laid down by this great document?

The Constitution was designed to work with only a moral and righteous people. "Our constitution," said John Adams (first vice-president and second president of the United States), "was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other" (John R. Howe, Jr., *The Changing Political Thought of John Adams*, Princeton University Press, 1966, p. 185).

True to the Faith That Our Parents Cherished

July 24, 1776—The Declaration of Independence

Drafted by Thomas Jefferson between June 11 and June 28, 1776, the Declaration of Independence is at once the nation's most cherished symbol of liberty and Jefferson's most enduring monument. Here, in exalted and unforgettable phrases, Jefferson expressed the convictions in the minds and hearts of the American people. The political philosophy of the Declaration was not new; its ideals of individual liberty had already been expressed by John Locke and the Continental philosophers. What Jefferson did was to summarize this philosophy in "self-evident truths" and set forth a list of grievances against the King in order to justify before the world the breaking of ties between the colonies and the mother country.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, —That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. ... With a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.



The Price They Paid by Ronald Regan (1981)

July Fourth is the birthday of our nation. I believed as a boy, and believe even more today, that it is the birthday of the greatest nation on earth. There is a legend about the day of our nation's birth in the little hall in Philadelphia, a day on which debate had raged for hours. The men gathered there were honorable men hard-pressed by a king who had flouted the very laws they were willing to obey. Even so, to sign the Declaration of Independence was such an irretrievable act that the walls resounded with the words "treason, the gallows, the headsman's axe," and the issue remained in doubt.

The legend says that at that point a man rose and spoke. He is described as not a young man, but one who had to summon all his energy for an impassioned plea. He cited the grievances that had brought them to this moment and finally, his voice falling, he said, "They may turn every tree into a gallows, every hole into a grave, and yet the words of that parchment can never die. To the mechanic in the workshop, they will speak hope; to the slave in the mines, freedom. Sign that parchment. Sign if the next moment the noose is around your neck, for that parchment will be the textbook of freedom, the Bible of the rights of man forever." He fell back exhausted. The 56 delegates, swept up by his eloquence, rushed forward and signed that document destined to be as immortal as a work of man can be. When they turned to thank him for his timely oratory, he was not to be found, nor could any be found who knew who he was or how he had come in or gone out through the locked and guarded doors.

Well, that is the legend. But we do know for certain that 56 men, a little band so unique we have never seen their like since, had pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. Some gave their lives in the war that followed, most gave their fortunes, and all preserved their sacred honor. What manner of men were they? Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists, 11 were merchants and tradesmen, and nine were farmers. They were soft-spoken men of means and education; they were not an unwashed rabble. They had achieved security but valued freedom more. Their stories have not been told nearly enough. John Hart was driven from the side of his desperately ill wife. For more than a year he lived in the forest and in caves before he returned to find his wife dead, his children vanished, his property destroyed. He died of exhaustion and a broken heart. Carter Braxton of Virginia lost all his ships, sold his home to pay his debts, and died in rags. And so it was with Ellery, Clymer, Hall, Walton, Gwinnett, Rutledge, Morris, Livingston and Middleton. Nelson personally urged Washington to fire on his home and destroy it when it became the headquarters for General Cornwallis. Nelson died bankrupt. But they sired a nation that grew from sea to shining sea...

In recent years... I've come to think of that day as more than just the birthday of a nation. It also commemorates the only true philosophical revolution in all history. Oh, there have been revolutions before and since ours. But those revolutions simply exchanged one set of rules for another. Ours was a revolution that changed the very concept of government. Let the Fourth of July always be a reminder that here in this land, for the first time, it was decided that man is born with certain God-given rights; that government is only a convenience created and managed by the people, with no powers of its own except those voluntarily granted to it by the people. We sometimes forget that great truth, and we never should.

Happy Fourth of July.

Ronald Reagan President of the United States



Ezra Taft Benson

Yes, I thank God for the sacrifices and efforts made by these Founding Fathers, whose efforts have brought us the blessings of political liberty and economic prosperity we have today. Their lives should be reminders that we are the blessed beneficiaries of a liberty earned by great sacrifices of property, reputation, and life.

Other great stalwarts who also pledged lives, possessions, and their sacred honor were the Mormon pioneers. This they did by covenant before God when they came to membership in His kingdom, "to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places ... even unto death." (*Mosiah 18:9.*)

Our Mormon forebears covenanted their lives!—and not a few gave them. The following places hallow the memory of the latter-day martyrs: Jackson County; Crooked River (where one of the Twelve was martyred); Haun's Mill; Carthage; Nauvoo; and the unmarked graves along the Mormon trail. They gave their fortunes!—and many, if not most, lost their lands, homes, and businesses. They gave their sacred honor!—this by covenant to God.

They came west with the faith that God had "set his hand again the second time" (*2 Ne. 21:11*) to restore the house of Israel. They knew that they were a part of this great movement. They were converted to the truth that the Church of Jesus Christ had been restored again on the earth through the instrumentality of a latter-day Prophet, Joseph Smith, and that following his martyrdom, the keys of the priesthood had been continued through Joseph's ordained successor, Brigham Young. They believed themselves to be God-directed and prophet-led. Their conviction inspired their sacrifices. They came—with indomitable faith and courage, following incredible suffering and adversity. They came—with stamina, with inspired confidence for better days.

Yes, they came—first the main caravan of 143 men, 3 women, and 2 children on July 24, 1847. This trickle of immigrants was followed by the hundreds, then the thousands, all seeking a home in safety. Yes, they came and carved an Eden out of the desert. Their promised land has become our prosperous valleys.

Today we live in a choice land, yes, a land choice above all other lands. We live amid unbounded prosperity—this because of the heritage bequeathed to us by our forebears, a heritage of self-reliance, initiative, personal industry, and faith in God, all in an atmosphere of freedom.

Were these Founding Fathers and pioneer forefathers to counsel us today in their fundamental beliefs—so manifest by their acts—what would they say to us?

Those intrepid forebears knew that their righteousness was the indispensable ingredient to liberty, that this was the greatest legacy they could pass on to future generations. They would counsel us to preserve that liberty by alert righteousness. Righteousness is always measured by a nation or an individual keeping the commandments of God... May we begin to repay this debt by preserving and strengthening this heritage in our own lives, in the lives of our children, their children, and generations yet unborn. (*Our Priceless Heritage* by Ezra Taft Benson, *Ensign*, 1976, November)

*(Excellent website to read about the first Mormon Trek:
<http://themormontrail.blogspot.com>)*