

**The Origin of the Republican form of Government
in the United States of America and the Hebrew Commonwealth**

by

**Oscar S. Straus, Jewish American statesman, diplomat, author
and U.S. Ambassador to Turkey**

In the Hebrew language, the United States of America is translated as “Countries of the Covenant.”

On January 10, 1884, Oscar S. Straus delivered a famous oration entitled *The Origin of the Republican form of Government in the United States and the Hebrew Commonwealth*.

In its January 11th, 1884 article, *Liberty in Old Testament Lands and in the United States*, the **New York Times** gives the following coverage:

“Mr. Oscar S. Straus* delivered yesterday evening to a large audience at Chickering Hall a lecture on *The Origin of the Republican form of Government in the United States and the Hebrew Commonwealth*. Mr. Straus has the advantage of a clear voice and an excellent delivery, and treated his subject in an interesting way. Very few people, excepting those who have carefully studied the history of our country, are aware that even prior to our Revolution, or perhaps during it, independence as it is understood today was believed to be possible. Mr. Straus repeated what Mr. Bancroft has written: “It is not a little remarkable, in the light of the immediate future, that of the American statesmen who assisted in the framing of the Government, not one was originally a republican.”

A very lucid examination was then made of the colonial government before the Revolution. The formation of the Government as an abstract idea having been treated, the fact was shown that in the history of nations, modern systems are formed by reverting to first principles. In the conception of the American Union Mr. Straus showed how deeply Americans were imbued with religious principles. **The Bible** was studied as no people excepting only the Jews had studied it. **The Pilgrims** likened themselves to the children of Israel; they quoted text and chapter, and adapted these to themselves. They had suffered, as the Jews, Egyptian bondage; they had passed through the Red Sea. The King of England was Pharaoh.

“Even in after days Washington and Adams were styled their Moses and Joshua. In accordance with these Scriptural ideas was it at all surprising that their first conception of the American union should be derived from a theocracy – the same form of government in all its essential characteristics as the children of Israel set up for the twelve tribes under their great law-giver, Moses?” It was with texts of the Old Testament that the idea of the supreme power of Kings, as delegated from God, was combated. It was from Joshua that was handed down to mankind 1,500 years before the Christian era that sublime fact that “all men were free and equal; that God and the law were the only kings.

The lecturer, who had carefully studied the theology of the revolutionary period, produced the texts of many sermons in proof of his theory. After referring to Lasker, Mr. Straus concluded as follows:

“Let those narrow-minded and misguided men who would corrupt the grand charter of our liberties by sectarian amendment shrink back in holy horror from so dastardly a crime. Let them read the records of their country’s birth, and from them learn that civil and religious liberty in spirit are

inseparable, and when they stab the one, they wound the other. Freedom of person, freedom of conscience, and toleration are the creed of our political faith, and they alone lead to peace, liberty and safety.”

One of the renowned sermons cited by Mr. Straus was, **The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor** – an Election Sermon preached before his excellency, Jonathan Trumbull, Esq., L.L.D., Governor and Commander-in-Chief, and the Honourable General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, convened at Hartford at the Anniversary Election, May 8th, 1783, by **Ezra Stiles, D.D.**, ** President of Yale College. It is excerpted as follows:

The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor

Deuteronomy 26:19

“And to make thee high above all nations, which He hath made in praise, and in name, and in honor; and that thou mayest be a holy people unto the Lord thy God.”

Taught by the omniscient Deity, **Moses** foresaw the predicted the capital events relative to Israel, through the successive changes of depression and glory, until their final elevation to the first dignity and eminence among the empires of the world. These events have been so ordered as to become a display of retribution and sovereignty; for while the good and evil, hitherto felt by this people, have been dispensed in the way of exact national retribution, their ultimate glory and honor will be of the **Divine sovereignty**, with a *not for your sakes, do I this, sayeth the Lord, be it known unto you – but for mine holy Name’s sake.*

However it may be doubted, whether political communities are rewarded and punished in this world only; and whether the prosperity and decline of other empires have corresponded with their moral state, as to virtue and vice; yet the history of the **Hebrew Theocracy** shows, that the secular welfare of God’s ancient people depended upon their virtue, their religion, their observance of that holy covenant, which Israel entered into with God, on the plains at the foot of Nebo on the other side of Jordan. Here **Moses**, the man of God, assembled three million of people, the number of the United States, recapitulated and gave them a second publication of the sacred jural institute, delivered thirty-eight years before, with the most awful solemnity at **Mount Sinai**. A Law dictated with sovereign authority by the **Most High** to a people, a world, a universe, becomes of invincible force and obligation without any reference to the consent of the governed: - it is obligatory for three reasons, viz. its original justice and unerring equity, the omnipotent Authority by which it is enforced, and the sanctions of rewards and punishments. But in the case of **Israel**, He condescended to a mutual covenant; and by the hand of Moses lead His people to avouch **the Lord Jehovah** to be **their God**, and in the most public and explicit manner voluntarily to engage and covenant with God to keep and obey His Law. Thereupon this great prophet, whom God had raised up for so solemn a transaction, declared in the name of the Lord, that the **Most High** avouched, acknowledged and chose them for a peculiar people to Himself; promising to be their God and Protector, and upon their obedience, to make them prosperous and happy. Deuteronomy 29: 10 and 14. Chapter 30: 9 and 19.

He foresaw indeed their rejection of God, and predicted the judicial chastisement of apostasy; a chastisement involving the righteous with the wicked. But as well to comfort and support the righteous in every age and under every calamity, as to make His power known among all nations, God determined

that *a remnant should be saved*. Whence **Moses and the Prophets, by Divine direction**, interspersed their writings with promises, that, when the ends of God's moral government should be answered in a series of national punishments, inflicted for a succession of ages, He would by His irresistible power and sovereign grace, subdue the hearts of His people to a free, willing, joyful obedience; turn their captivity; - recover and gather them from all the nations wither the Lord had scattered them in His fierce anger – **bring them into the land which their fathers possessed** – and multiply them above their fathers – and rejoice over them for good, as He rejoiced over their fathers. Deuteronomy 30: 3.

Then the words of **Moses**, hitherto accomplished, but in part, will be literally fulfilled; when **this branch of the posterity of Abraham** shall be nationally collected, and become a very distinguished and glorious people, under the **great Messiah, the Prince of Peace**. He will then make them high above all nations which He hath made in praise, and in name, and in honor, and they shall become a holy people unto the Lord their God.

I shall enlarge no further upon the primary sense and literal accomplishment of this and **numerous other prophecies** respecting both Jews and Gentiles, in the latter day upon the political welfare of **God's American Israel**; and as allusively prophetic of the future prosperity and splendour of the United States. We may then consider:

- I. What reason we have to expect that, **by the blessing of God**, these States may prosper and flourish into a great American Republic; and ascend into high and distinguished honour among the nations of the earth. *To make thee high above all nations, which He hath made in praise, and in name, and in honour.*
- II. That our system of dominion in Civil Polity would be imperfect, without the true Religion; or, that from the diffusion of virtue among the people of any community, would arise their greatest secular happiness: which will terminate in this conclusion, that holiness ought to be the end of all civil government. **"That thou mayest be a holy people unto the Lord thy God."** ...

***Oscar S. Straus (1850-1926)** is most noted for his brilliant efforts as one of America's first Jewish career diplomats. He came to the United States with his parents from southern Germany in the early 1850's. After a childhood spent in Georgia, Straus moved with his family to New York, where he practiced law and business. His first distinguished post came when he was appointed **American Ambassador to Turkey** in the late 1880's by President Grover Cleveland. He was reappointed to the same position by President William McKinley in 1898, and by President William Howard Taft in 1909. Between 1902 and 1926, he served under three presidents at the International Court of Arbitration at The Hague in the Netherlands. As **Secretary of Commerce and Labor** under President Theodore Roosevelt, Straus successfully settled many problems concerning Japanese immigration and naturalization. No citizen did more to help Jewish refugees after World War I than Straus, himself a Jew. When he died in New York City in 1926, he was mourned as an outstanding diplomat and benefactor of humanity.

****Ezra Stiles (1727-1795)** was an American minister of Gospel, as well as being one of the greatest educators in the history of **Yale University**. In 1755, he formed a lifelong friendship with **Benjamin Franklin**, in whose scientific research Stiles was greatly interested. In addition to his duties as preacher and educator, he studied science intensively and corresponded with savants worldwide. In 1778 he was appointed to the presidency of Yale College, a post he held until his death. As well as teaching Church

History, he lectured on philosophy and astronomy, achieving a reputation for scholarship unequaled in America at the time.

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