



Established by God

Americans collectively breathed a sigh of relief when it was announced that the Cold War had come to an “end” in 1989. The breakup of the Soviet empire seemed to signal an end to repressive government and impending nuclear disaster. Various people spoke of a “peace dividend” and claimed that “democracy is breaking out all over,” as if all the problems of the world could now be solved. Subsequent events have frustrated that view. “Ethnic cleansing” was a term coined in the 1990’s; regional conflicts in Africa, eastern Europe, and the Middle East continue to dominate the news. In America, corruption in high places has soured Americans to government in spite of the longest-lasting economic boom in history. In recent national elections, as few as half of those eligible to vote have even made the effort to go to the polls. Government officials have become the object of late-night and prime-time jokes and off-color humor. Disenchantment with governments of every label is widespread. In the midst of all this, even Christians may forget that government was established by a loving God. Regardless of the type of government in place at any given time, Scripture clearly states *“The authorities that exist have been established by God.”* (Romans 13:1) Whether a dictatorship or a democratic form of government is not the point. The truth is that because of man’s sinfulness there is a need for some form of government or authority.

From Scripture it is evident that God established government with clear blessings in mind. To quote from one authority, *“God has established government so that people may live in some degree of peace in a sin-filled world. The government’s responsibility is to preserve the greatest possible peace and order in the world by punishing evildoers, rewarding those who do*

good, and protecting the rights of the law-abiding.” This is God’s plan as he wrote in Romans 13. Paul writes that government was established to stop those who do wrong and to reward those who do right.

This good gift may have been misused by sinners throughout history, but it is clear that God has nevertheless instituted government in its various forms to be a blessing to society.

It is interesting to note that throughout the Scriptures God established many different types of governments that held authority over his people. Let us see how God used each of them for his purposes.

PATRIARCHY

In Genesis 9:5,6, God said to Noah, *“From each man,...I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has*

God made man.” Since Noah (ca. 3400 BC) was the only authority present after the Flood, it is evident that God chose to use a **patriarchy** (government through the father as the head of the family or tribe) as the means by which to control the outward behavior of society. This patriarchal form of governing continued through the

lives of Abraham, “the father of believers,” as well as Isaac and Jacob.

ABSOLUTE MONARCHY

It was during Jacob’s later years that a famine struck the land of Canaan and he and his family were forced to search for food elsewhere. Consequently they discovered food available in Egypt, thanks to his long lost son, Joseph. When the Israelites moved to Egypt at the invitation of the Egyptian government,

“Of the many influences that have shaped the United States into a distinctive nation and people, none may be said to be more fundamental and enduring than the Bible.”

Ronald Reagan

they were blessed with land and food in the midst of famine. Here they were subject to the pharaoh, an **absolute monarch** (one who rules with no limits on his or her authority). The descendants of Jacob suffered greatly under this form of oppressive government. God's plan was to return his people to the land of Canaan.

THEOCRACY

Four hundred years later, Jacob's descendants departed Egypt to return to Canaan, their "promised land." While traveling to Canaan, at Mount Sinai (ca. 1500 BC), God established a **theocracy** (literally government by God through his chosen leaders). All facets of the lives of God's people (civil, ceremonial, and moral) were laid out in detail for them by a loving God who continued to bless them. This form of government continued for some time after they entered the Promised Land.

JUDGES

When sinful attitudes and behavior arose among the Israelites, God allowed them to be oppressed by neighboring nations until they repented. In his love, God governed them through the **judges** ("to exercise authority"), or "deliverers". Some of these judges included Othniel, Gideon, Samson, Eli and the woman judge, Deborah.

KINGS

About 1050 BC, the Israelites demanded a **king** so that they could be like the nations around them. In spite of Samuel's warning that such a leader would bring about the same problems that plagued all other countries led by monarchs, God allowed Samuel, the last of the judges, to anoint Saul to be the first king of Israel. This governing by one king continued through the reigns of David and Solomon. God continued to bless his people, who even gained international attention under King Solomon. Yet immediately after his reign (120 years under these first three kings) the people disagreed on the successor to Solomon. Thus God's chosen people and his promised land were broken into two pieces: the Northern Kingdom of Israel under the leadership of King Jeroboam I and the Southern Kingdom of Judah under the reign of King Rehoboam. Israel would ultimately be ruled by 18 more kings after Jeroboam and Judah by 19 more following Rehoboam. Although there were a few godly rulers in these two kingdoms, for the most part the warnings of Samuel turned out to be all too true, with wickedness prevailing. (Read 1 Samuel 8)

EMPIRE

But the people repeatedly despised God's faithfulness and love toward them. Subsequently, God used the fierce Assyrian empire to destroy the persistently evil Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin were carried away by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar.

The faithful believers found peace and prosperity even during the Babylonian Captivity and later throughout the conquest by the Persian **Empire**, which allowed a remnant of the believers to return to Jerusalem by 536 BC.

God preserved a portion of his people intact through subsequent rule by the Greeks (under Alexander the Great) and eventually the Romans, during whose rule Christ was born and the New Testament Church grew and prospered. Here we see Paul (author of the Romans 13 exhortation) jailed and put to death by Nero, one of the most evil rulers in the history of the world.

Our God is a God of orderliness. And so throughout the history of the world, God has established many different forms of government, each with the express purpose of providing its citizens with peaceful lives.

GOD SPEAKS

1. Read Romans 13:3-7. How does government act as "an agent of wrath"? Why are Christians commanded to submit to government authorities?
2. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-3. What blessings can we expect from a well-run government?
3. Read 2 Kings 19:20-36. How do we know that the events of history, and the actions of governments, must conform to God's plan?

WE SPEAK

1. What particular blessings does God shower on us through our government?
2. Mention particular instances from history where government has provided peace, order, and security for society (including Christians).
3. Why has God allowed so many different types of governments throughout history?
4. Why doesn't God always step in when he sees a government is an evil government?

RESEARCH

The book of Proverbs includes several interesting references to civil governments. Discuss the following:

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Proverbs 11:11 | Proverbs 16:12 | Proverbs 25:5 |
| Proverbs 14:34 | Proverbs 21:1 | Proverbs 28:2 |