

What Does It Mean To Be: *Revolutionary*
American Enlightenment
The Founding Fathers
18th Century America
Part 2

Psalm 33:10-12

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your friendly neighborhood historian

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Presentations and recordings for the **Compass Community** at [Village Seven Presbyterian Church](#)
 for: Winter 2025 – Spring 2026, by [Bill Petro](#)

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Recordings

-  Signifies lesson *audio recording*
- Links to articles for *further reading*

Slides

image	DATE	TITLE	PDF LINK
	May 31	20. What Does it Mean to be <i>Revolutionary</i>: Faith of the Founding Fathers American Revolution, Part 2  May-31_Revolutionary-2 • George Washington • Thomas Jefferson • John Adams • Ben Franklin • James Madison • John Witherspoon • Alexander Hamilton	Revolutionary, 2

Related
Articles

Objective

By the end of this session, you should be able to

- Evaluate the **Declaration of Independence**
- Appraise the **Faith of the Founding Founders**

Founding Fathers: “Framers”

- Declaration of Independence
 - Ben Franklin
 - John Adams
 - George Washington
 - James Madison
 - John Witherspoon
 - Thomas Jefferson
- Constitution

Faith of our *Fathers*

“Planting”

Puritan Fathers:

Personal
&
Public

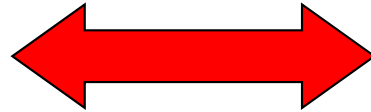
Society

“Founding”

Revolutionary Fathers:

Personal
&
Private

Individual



Drafters of Declaration of Independence:

Committee of 5

- Roger Sherman CT Calvinist
- Robert Livingston NY Anglican
- Benjamin Franklin PA Deist
- John Adams MA Unitarian
- Thomas Jefferson VA Unitarian



“Committee of Five,” in John Trumbull’s 1817 painting *Declaration of Independence*

Declaration of Independence

A Declaration by the Representatives of the UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for ^{one} people to
dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to
~~assume a new and separate station~~ ^{as}
-sume among the powers of the earth the ^{separate and equal} station to
which the laws of nature & of nature's god entitle them, a decent respect
to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes
which impel them to ~~this~~ ^{the} separation.

We hold these truths to be ^{self-evident} that all men are
created equal, ~~independent~~ ^{that from their equal creation they derive}
~~unalienable~~ ^{rights that} inherent & inalienable, among ^{these} are ~~life, liberty, & the pursuit of happiness~~
life, liberty, & the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these ^{rights}, go-
vernments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from

- When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the *laws of nature* and of **nature's God** entitles them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.
- 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.
- We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in general Congress assembled, appealing to the **Supreme Judge** of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name and by the authority of the good people of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States...
- And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of **Divine Providence**, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to this separation. — 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. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all reference hath hitherto been to the former Systems of Government. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct and plain the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world. — He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. — He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them. — He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of People, unless those People would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only. — He has called together legislative Bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their Public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures. — He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the People. — He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative Powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within. — He has endeavoured to prevent the Population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Strangers; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands. — He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary Powers. — He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their Offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries. — He has created a multitude of new Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our People, and eat out their Substance. — He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our Legislature. — He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power. — He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our Constitution, and unacknowledged by our Laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation: — For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us: — For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States: — For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world: — For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent: — For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by jury: — For transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offences: — For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies: — For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments: — For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever. — He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us. — He has plundered our Seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our People. — He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation. — He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executors of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands. — He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions. In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free People. Nor have We been wanting in attention to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their Legislature to extend an unwarrantable Jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of conciliation. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. — And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Button Gwinnett
Lyman Hall
George Walton.

John Hooper
Joseph Hewes
John Penn

Edward Rutledge.

John Jay
Thomas Lynch
Arthur Middleton

John Hancock
Samuel Adams
John Adams
Thomas Jefferson
George Wythe
Richard Henry Lee
Thomas Paine
John Adams
George Wythe
Richard Henry Lee
Thomas Paine
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John Jay
Thomas Lynch
Arthur Middleton

Ben Franklin



- “God governs the affairs of men.”
- “I have some doubts as to [Jesus’] divinity...
and think it needless to busy myself with it
now, when I expect soon an opportunity of
knowing the truth with less trouble.”

Ben Franklin's Tombstone



John Adams

- “To be good, and to do good, is all we have to do.”
- “I do not...attach much importance to creeds because I believe he cannot be wrong whose life is right.”
- On *Predestination*: “If there is no liberty, there is no responsibility. No virtue, no vice, no merit or demerit, no reward and no punishment.”
- “The Government is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.”



George Washington

- Personal prayer diary:
 - God would accept him because of “the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ”
- Attended church inconsistently & never took Communion
- On God:
 - "The Grand Architect"
 - "The Governor of the Universe"
 - "The Supreme Dispenser of All Good"



John Witherspoon

- Scottish Presbyterian minister
- President of Princeton
- Signed Declaration of Indep.
- Helped draft: Articles of Confederation
- Supported the Constitution
- Educated:
 - James Madison, Aaron Burr, Jr...

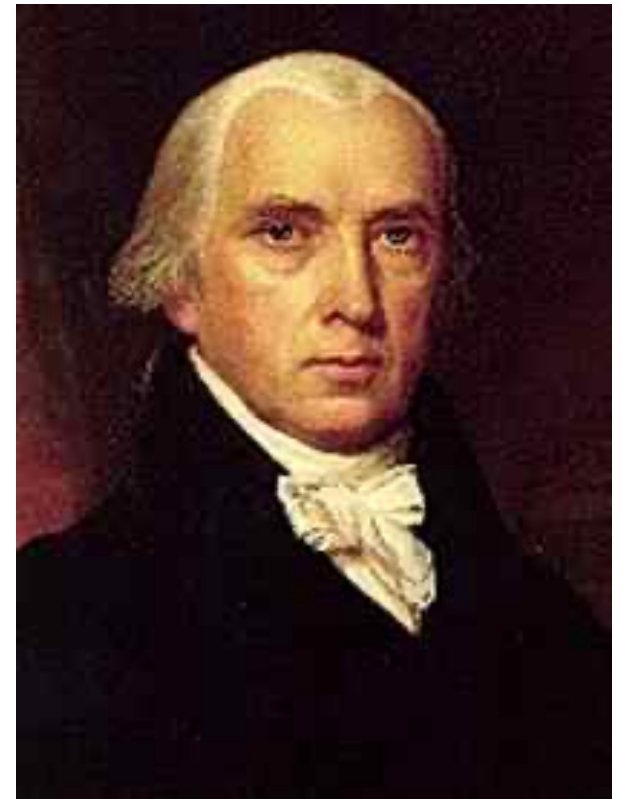


James Madison

- In 1778 to the Virginia Convention on Ratifying the Constitution:

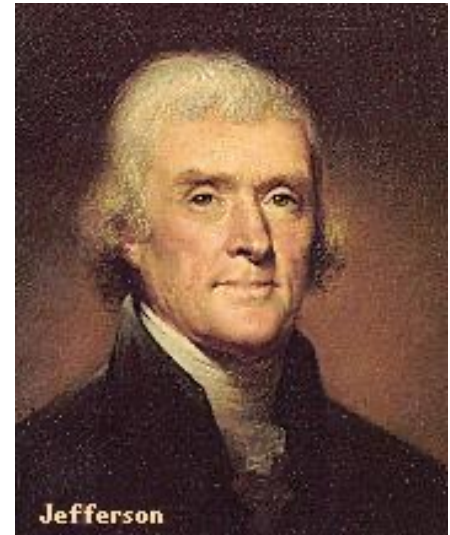
"Freedom arises from the multiplicity of sects [denominations], which pervades America, and which is the best and only security for religious liberty in any society...

“For where there is such a variety of sects, there cannot be a majority of any one sect to oppress and persecute the rest.”



Thomas Jefferson

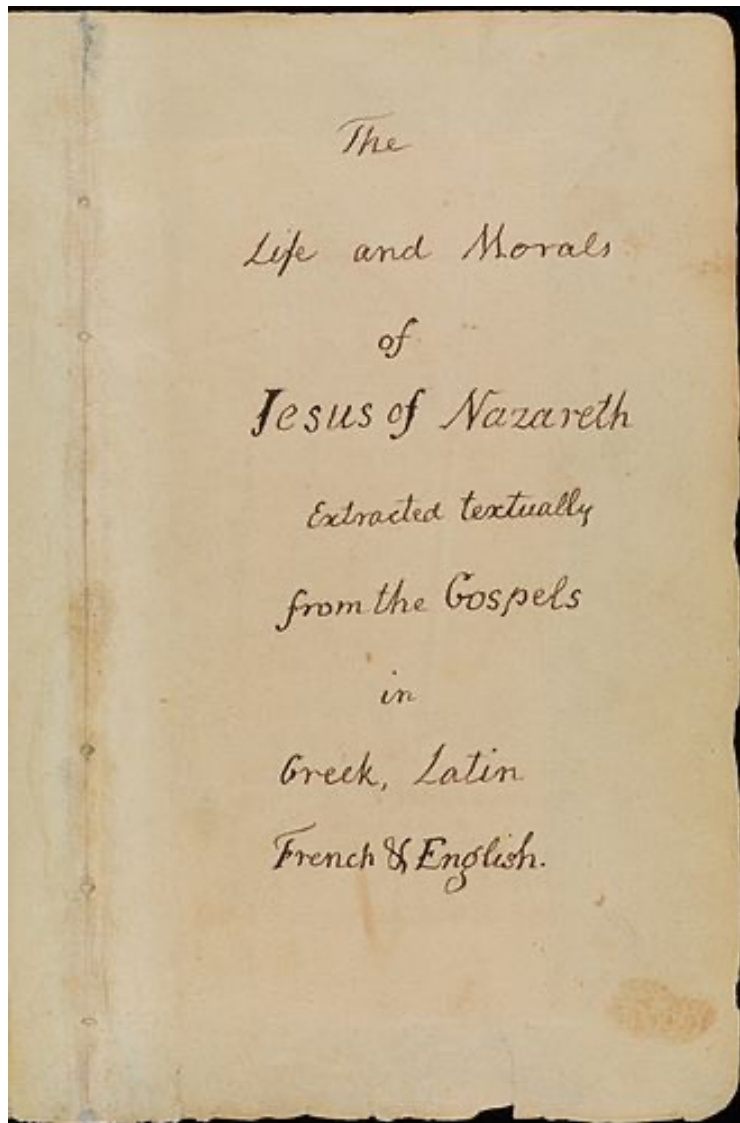
- For the last 50 years of his life, read NT daily, often in Greek & Latin... and French
- “I am a real Christian...sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others.”



Thomas Jefferson on Religion

- Trinity: “mere abracadabra”
- Jesus’ miracles: “vulgar ignorance... & fabrications”
- Calvin “introduced more new absurdities into the Christian religion than can readily be imagined”
- “The prophecies in Revelation are the ravings of a maniac”
- “I trust that there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die a Unitarian”
- “I am of a sect by myself, as far as I know.”

Jefferson Bible



*The
Life and Morals
of
Jesus of Nazareth

Extracted textually
from the Gospels
in
Greek, Latin
French & English*

Thomas Jefferson on Religion, *cont*

- “... our rulers can have no authority over such natural rights, only as we have submitted to them (in a social compact.) The rights of conscience we never submitted, we could not submit. We are answerable for them to our God...”
- “But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are *twenty gods*, or *no God*.”
- Sept 1800 Election, was called: “an enemy to pure morals and religion, and consequently an enemy to his country and his God.”

Jefferson's Tombstone:

Author of the

- Declaration
of American Independence

of the

- Statute of Virginia for
Religious Freedom

And

- Father of the
University of Virginia



Christianity: Federal vs. State

- Federal Government: *Article I, Amendments to the Constitution*

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

- State Government: *Article 22, Constitution of Delaware*

“Every person who shall be chosen a member of either house to any office or place of trust... [shall] also make and subscribe the following declaration, to wit:

- *“I do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God, blessed for evermore; and I do acknowledge the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration.”*

Christianity and the Enlightenment: Agreement of Goals for Different Reasons

To Protect the Elect
(Man is Evil)

Christianity

Separation of Church and State

**Enlightenment
Rationalism**

To Permit Man to be Autonomous
(Man is Good)

Alexis de Tocqueville on America

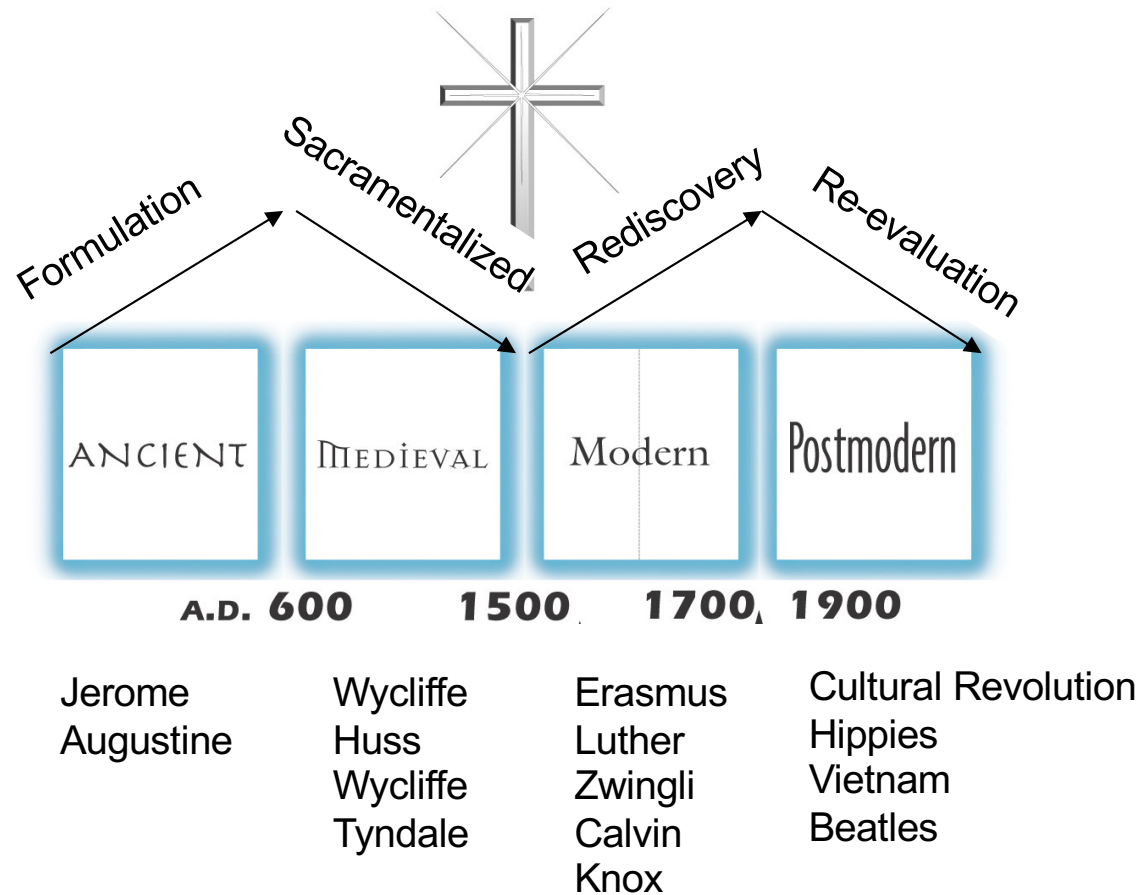
- The reason America is great is because it has a “**Christian Soul**”
- Dr. David A. Noebel, Summit Ministries:
“America has a **Secular Mind**.”

1-Word Summary

• Pilgrims	Separatists
• Puritans	Saints
• Denominations	Inclusive
• Whitefield	Dramatic
• Wesley	Methodism
• Edwards	Glory
• Great Awakening	Fire
• Enlightenment	Rationalism
• Deism	Mechanistic
• Declaration of Ind.	Nation
• Constitution	Republic.



The Divisions of History



1-Word Summary

• Catholic Church	Merit
• Luther	Justification
• Zwingli	Sovereignty
• Anabaptists	Believer's Baptism
• Calvin	Omnipotence
• Arminius	Ability
• "Calvinism"	TULIP
• Knox	Thundering
• Henry VIII	Married

American Church History

Colonial Years	National Era	Modern Times	Postmodern Period
	1787	1865	1960

Age of Divine
Sovereignty

Age of
Biblicistic
Rationalism
and Common
Sense

Age of
Rationalism
and Science

Age of
Privatism,
Relativism,
Self, and
Despair