

What's the big deal about the Ten Commandments?

Laws of Moses do not restrict human freedom; they define, ensure and protect it

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Did you know that the 11 words inscribed on the Liberty Bell, “Proclaim liberty throughout all the Land Unto all the inhabitants thereof,” were written by Moses? Did you know that Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and John Adams originally proposed that the Great Seal of the United States include an image of Moses with the motto “Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God”?

Did you know that when the nine justices of the Supreme Court meet to deliberate the law of our land, they do so under the watchful eyes of a sculpture of Moses carved in stone on the courthouse's east pediment?

Did you know that the House chamber in the U.S. Capitol is surrounded by 23 marble relief portraits of historical figures noted for their work in establishing the principles that underlie American law, and that 22 of these portraits surround and look to the central figure of Moses etched in stone on the chamber's north wall?

Did you know that there's an oil painting of Moses in the stairway of our nation's Great Hall of the Department of Justice?

Did you know there is a statue of Moses along the balustrade in the Main Reading Room of the Library of Congress?

Did you know that anti-slavery activists, including Harriet Beecher Stowe and Sojourner Truth, cited Moses as their example in their fight for human dignity, freedom and emancipation?

Did you know that Thomas Paine, one of the most outspoken anti-religious leaders of our nation's founding, wrote prolifically about the story of Moses as America's inspiration in its fight against the British monarchy?



Did you know that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. hardly made a speech in his march for civil rights that didn't refer to the story of Exodus and Moses?

Did you know that King's "Letter From Birmingham Jail" implicitly referenced the "just laws" of Moses as the only justification for civil disobedience?

Did you know that when a comprehensive survey of American rhetoric during our founding era was done to assess what ideas most influenced the American Revolution, the person most frequently cited by American revolutionaries was not Montesquieu, Locke, Hume, Hobbes, Plutarch or Cicero, but Moses?

In his book "America's Prophet," Bruce Feiler argues that Moses' influence on America is due to our Founding Fathers' understanding of one fundamental truth: the paradox of liberty and law. The lesson that the first generation of Americans learned from Moses was quite simple: Liberty presupposes law. There is no freedom outside the self-evident fences endowed to us by our Creator. Thus, the language of our nation's Declaration of Independence.

Despite all this, however, our country's cultural elites have come to think that teaching the laws of Moses in our public schools is an egregious breach of the wall separating church from state. But even an elementary school understanding of American history teaches the opposite. By quoting Moses repeatedly, Jefferson, Franklin, Adams, James Madison and Paine were not calling for a theocracy, but they were instead stating the obvious: Everyone — the religious and nonreligious alike — benefits from a Mosaic understanding of the laws of nature and nature's God.

In other words, the men who wrote our Constitution and set the parameters for the liberties we now enjoy understood that the laws of Moses do not restrict human freedom but rather serve to define, ensure and protect it.

Another way to say it is that our founders knew that when any culture discards the "big laws" of Moses, it won't get more liberty; to the contrary, it will get much less. They understood that when people refuse to live by the 10 simple laws of God, they will inevitably get reams upon reams of little laws that rush in to fill the vacuum, thousands of rules and regulations imposed by arrogant oligarchs who think they know better than we do about how we should live our lives, raise our children and spend our money, and what pronouns we should use.

So, this week, as you watch the talking heads on MSNBC and CNN lose their minds over Louisiana's new law requiring schools to post Moses' Ten Commandments in their classrooms, ask yourself this: What's the big deal? Jefferson, Franklin, Adams, Paine and King all cited the laws of Moses as the foundation of our constitutional republic. If Moses

has so profoundly influenced our national character and personal freedoms that he is featured in the halls of Congress and in the statuary of the Supreme Court of the United States, then why wouldn't we want to teach his lessons and his laws to the next generation of America's leaders?

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