

AMERICA 250 — PART 3

“Where Did the Founders Get Their Ideas?”

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Introduction

Welcome back, I'm glad you've joined us today for Part 3 of our America 250 series, as we celebrate 250 years of this great nation.

We've been asking a foundational question—and I mean that literally—a *foundational* question: Where did the Founding Fathers get their ideas for American government?

Today, I want to show you hard evidence—not opinion, not sentiment—but documented, scholarly evidence that points to one primary source: the Bible.

Let's open with the words of the Psalmist:

Psa. 119:105 *Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.*

Psa. 119:130 *The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.*

Then David by the Holy Spirit tells us

Psa. 36:9 *For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.*

That light is exactly what shaped the minds of the men who built this nation.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

You've heard the phrase “the elephant in the room.” It means everyone can see a major issue, but people choose to ignore it—they act like it isn't there.

For the last hundred to a hundred and fifty years, that's exactly how secular historians have treated the Bible's role in the founding of America. They've minimized it. Dismissed it. Or ignored it altogether.

But here's what the evidence actually shows: the Bible was *the* dominant source of ideas in the thinking and writings of the Founding Fathers.

Now, this influence came in two ways. First, *directly*—from the Founders' own reading and knowledge of Scripture along with sermons they heard. And second, *indirectly*—through centuries of legal and philosophical development that was itself rooted in the Bible.

And we don't have to take anyone's word for it. We have the research to prove it.

THE RESEARCH

A political science professor at the University of Houston spent *twenty years* researching the sources behind America's founding ideas. His name was Donald Lutz, and together with scholar Charles Hyneman, he reviewed approximately *fifteen thousand* documents—speeches, diaries, letters, pamphlets, newspaper articles—written between 1760 and 1805.

They catalogued every cited source. Every reference. And this is what they discovered:

The *single most cited source* among the Founding Fathers—by a wide margin—was the *Bible*. It averaged 34% of all citations across the entire 45-year period studied. But in the 1770s—the very decade that produced the Declaration of Independence—that number climbed to **44%**.

Think about that. Nearly half of all the ideas being referenced and quoted during the birth of this nation came directly from Scripture.

The next most cited sources were Enlightenment thinkers—Montesquieu at 8%, Blackstone at just under 8%, and John Locke close behind. But here's the question we have to ask: *Where did those men get their ideas?*

The answer may surprise you—but it shouldn't. The Bible.

MONTESQUIEU

Let's look briefly at these three men, starting with **Montesquieu—Charles de Secondat, the Baron Montesquieu of France** (1689 to 1755).

His most famous work was *The Spirit of Laws*, and his great contribution to American government was the concept of the *separation of powers*—dividing government into three branches: the Executive, the Legislative, and the Judiciary. You recognize that immediately as the structure of our own government today.

But where did Montesquieu's thinking come from? He believed that all law has its ultimate source in God—the Creator, Preserver, and Lawgiver. He believed that human beings, because of sin, are self-centered and in need of restraint. And he believed that Christianity, in particular, produced good laws and good government precisely because it provided the means to restrain human evil.

Those are not Enlightenment ideas pulled from thin air. Those are *biblical* ideas—straight from Scripture.

BLACKSTONE

Next is Sir William Blackstone, who lived from 1723 to 1780. He wrote the four-volume *Commentaries on the Laws of England*—and over a thousand leading jurists, lawyers, future presidents, and signers of the Declaration of Independence subscribed to those commentaries before they were even published. They became the gold standard of legal thinking for the next hundred years.

And they were filled—*filled*—with biblical references.

Blackstone himself wrote this about the law of nature—read carefully:

“Man, considered as a creature, must necessarily be subject to the laws of his Creator ... And consequently as man depends absolutely upon his Maker for everything, it is necessary that he should in all points conform to his Maker’s will. This will of his Maker is called the law of nature.”

That is the foundation of American law. And it is thoroughly, unapologetically biblical.

JOHN LOCKE

Now let’s talk about John Locke—perhaps the most frequently mentioned influence on Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence.

Here’s what you may have been told: that Locke was a deist—someone who believed in a distant, hands-off God with no interest in Scripture or revelation. Certainly not someone to pray to or to look to for salvation. You may have been told his ideas were purely secular philosophy.

That is simply not true.

John Locke was reared in a Bible-centered Puritan home in England. He believed the Scripture was the ultimate authority for life and belief. And he wrote these remarkable words in his work *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith*:

“The Holy Scripture is to me, and always will be, the constant guide of my belief, and I shall always hearken to it, as containing infallible truth relating to the things of the highest concernment.”

He also wrote plainly—that all people are sinners, liable to condemnation, and the only way to be saved is to believe that Jesus was the Messiah who died for our sins. Further, that we can be justified only by God’s grace through faith.

No deist would ever write anything like that.

So when Locke influenced the Founding Fathers—and he did—he was bringing *biblical* ideas with him. And one of those ideas was the phrase “*law of nature*,” which appears in the Declaration of Independence itself.

Many people assume that phrase comes from secular Enlightenment philosophy. But Christian theologians had been using it for over *five hundred years* before the Declaration was written—as a description of God’s moral law written into creation and into the hearts of all people. That’s exactly what Romans chapter 2 describes—the law written on the heart, the conscience bearing witness.

Thomas Aquinas used the phrase in the 1200s. John Calvin used it. Early Puritan theologian William Ames used it, defining it as “*the law of God, which is naturally written in the heart of all men.*” And in 1764, James Otis—arguing against the Stamp Act—declared that the essential rights of the British Constitution were founded “*in the law of God and nature.*”

From the 1300s all the way to Blackstone in the 1760s, “the law of nature” meant one thing: *the eternal moral law of God*. That’s what it meant when it appeared in the Declaration of Independence.

Closing

Here is the conclusion of everything we've seen today.

When the Founding Fathers quoted Montesquieu, Blackstone, and Locke, they were not abandoning biblical thought. They were drawing from thinkers who were *themselves* drawing from the Bible.

The Bible was not a minor footnote in the founding of America. It was the *foundation*. It shaped the men who wrote the laws. It shaped the thinkers those men read. It provided the moral framework for a nation built on the idea that rights come not from government—but from God.

Secular historians have tried to tell us otherwise for over a century. But the documents don't lie. Forty-four percent of the ideas being cited in the 1770s came directly from Scripture. And the rest—when you trace them back far enough—came from Scripture too.

The elephant in the room isn't so easy to ignore anymore.

"For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light." — **Psalm 36:9**

That light—the Word of God—is what illuminated the minds of the men who built this republic. And it is still the lamp for our feet and the light for our path today.

I encourage you to read and study your Bible daily. It will provide clarity, direction, and truth for your life—just as it did for the men who founded this nation.

Thank you for joining us today for Part 3 of *America 250*. We'll see you next time.