

## Lesson Twenty-Six

# Republics And Democracies

### LESSON IDEA

To show the difference between a republic and a democracy as forms of government, and why the Founders opted for a republic.

### PREPARATION

Make a copies of the definition of democracy on page four, and the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag, for each family member.

**S**UPPOSE THAT YOU WERE ASKED to prepare a one-question multiple choice test for your school classmates, asking: "What form of government do we have in the United States?" The possible answers would be: anarchy, monarchy, republic, or democracy. Which answer do you think most of your classmates select? [Ask each student to reply.]

Few would likely choose anarchy, which means no government at all. Probably none would pick monarchy, which means rule by a king or queen. Few if any would select republic. Surveys indicate that the vast majority of high school students have been led to believe that the United States is a democracy, and has always been one. But based on our last three lessons, which of the four possibilities would you choose?

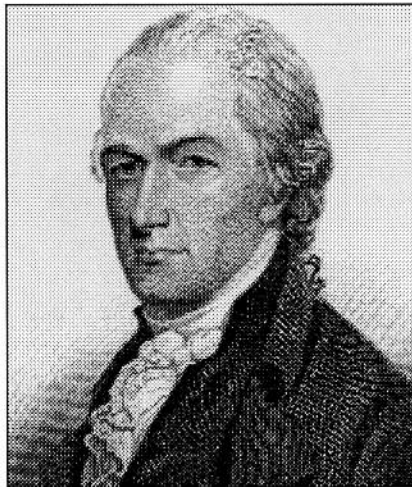
The Founders were emphatic about the form of government they preferred for the new nation. The Constitution not only specified that the federal Government was to be a republic, but also guaranteed a republican form of government for every state. In fact, the word "democracy" does not appear in the Constitution (including the Bill of Rights), the Declaration of Independence, or the constitutions of any of the 50 states. Do you think that the Founders may never have heard of democracy?

Actually, the men who framed the Constitution were very familiar with "democracy" as a form of government. And they both disliked and feared it.

James Madison, often called the father of the Constitution, described democracies in these words:

.... democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security, or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.

Even Alexander Hamilton, considered to be one of the more liberal Founding Fathers, had this to say about the matter:



Alexander Hamilton

It has been observed that a pure democracy, if it were practicable, would be the most perfect government. Experience had proved that no position is more false than this. The ancient democracies in which the people themselves deliberated never possessed one good feature of government. Their very character was tyranny; their figure deformity.

Democracy was discussed at the Constitutional Convention.

Each time it was mentioned, it was vigorously condemned. On May 31, 1787, Edmund Randolph told his fellow delegates that the purpose of the Convention was "to provide a cure for the evils under which the United States labored; that in tracing these evils to their origin every man had found it in the turbulence and trials of democracy...."

**P**ERHAPS AN ILLUSTRATION will help clarify why the Founders had such an aversion for "democracy." Consider, for example, the "Wild West" of 150 years ago. Law enforcement was a big problem, since there were not enough marshals, sheriffs, and rangers to go around. It therefore not unusual for citizens to

take the law into their own hands.

Perhaps you have heard of something called a lynch mob. Who can tell us what it was? A posse might track down someone accused of stealing horses or rustling cattle. Once the alleged culprit was caught, members of the posse might vote on the spot to decide his fate. Suppose, for instance, that there were 35 men on one side, and the suspected rustler on the other. How do you think the vote would go? It would likely be 35 to 1 in favor of hanging the supposed culprit. It would be democracy in action — majority rule literally with, literally, a vengeance.

But is the majority always right? Suppose the suspected rustler was innocent. What chance would he have had? [Encourage everyone to answer.] In a republic, his case would have been handled in a far different manner. There would still be one suspected thief, and 35 men in the posse. But after apprehending the suspect, the leader of the posse would say something like, “Wait a minute. We can’t hang this man. He deserves a speedy trial by a jury of his peers.” Instead of being hanged, the suspect would be taken to jail to await trial.

**T**HE WORD “DEMOCRACY” comes from two Greek words — *demos* meaning people, and *kratia*, meaning to rule. So democracy, in the early Greek city-states, meant the people ruled. Now, of course, in Greece about 600 years before the birth of Christ, there were leaders of the people. We would call them “politicians,” but the Greeks called them *demagogues*, which simply meant the leaders of the people. But what does demagogue mean today? Why do you think its meaning has changed?

#### FOR THE SERIOUS STUDENT

Read the essay, “Republics and Democracies,” by Robert Welch. Look up as many of the references Mr. Welch cites as possible. Though the essay is currently out-of-print, it appeared (slightly condensed) as the cover story of *The New American* for February 1, 1999 (single copies available for \$2.95 from *The New American*, P.O. Box 8040, Appleton, WI 54914). [I’m assuming that “Republics and Democracies” is out-of-print in pamphlet form; if *The New American* version is posted on our website when the FHS lessons are published, the URL could be noted here. — rw]

The early Greeks learned that a very persuasive leader, or demagogue, could get the majority to do almost anything — to take the property of the rich for their own use; to go to war against another city-state; to imprison or enslave foreigners; or to suppress a different religion. So a very wise Greek named Solon proposed that written laws be adopted for all Greeks to follow, which would limit what government or the people could do. Solon stated that a well-governed state was one in which “the people obey the rulers, and the rulers obey the laws.” Does this sound like a good idea to you? How is this different from democracy?

Unfortunately, back in the Sixth Century B.C., the Greeks were never able to implement fully all of Solon’s proposals. But his laws were not lost, because in 454 B.C. the Roman Senate sent a commission to Greece to study and report on Solon’s recommendations. As a result, Rome ultimately adopted *The Twelve Tables*. The *Tables* contained a code of government, posted for all to see, which specified what government could and could not do. And the first real republic was born.

The Roman historian Livy described a republic as “a Government of laws and not of men.” In other words, under Roman rule, there were some things government was not permitted to do — even if ninety-nine percent of the citizens voted for it. In a republic, the power of government is limited by a written constitution; and the rights of the minorities — to be free, to own property, to worship as they please — are protected from the prejudices, envy, or malice of the majority.

Our study this evening has only been able to scratch the surface of the differences between a republic and a democracy. But based on what we have learned so far, how would you describe the differences between these two forms of government? [Encourage answers from everyone.] Which do you think is better? Do you agree our Founding Fathers were wise in giving us a republic, and in fearing and hating democracies?

**I**F THE UNITED STATES is a republic, and was meant by the Founders to remain one, why do so many Americans today believe that we are a democracy, and have always been one? Some might claim that we are a democratic republic, or a republic within in a democracy, but such men as Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton,

