

“THE BIBLE OF THE REVOLUTION”

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The War for Independence brought to a halt the importation of Bibles from England to the Colonies, and no Bible had yet been printed on American shores. The first man to go about rectifying the problem was Philadelphia printer, Robert Aitken, and he did so with the enthusiastic support of Congress. In January 1781 Aitken petitioned the Congress to sanction publication of the new Bible translation on which he was working. Among other things, Aitken stated in his request: “no doubt but this work is an Object worthy the attention of the Congress of the United States of America, who will not neglect spiritual security, while they are virtuously contending for temporal blessings. Under this persuasion your Memorialist begs leave to, inform your Honours That he both begun and made considerable progress in a neat Edition of the Holy Scriptures for the use of schools, But being cautious of suffering his copy of the Bible to Issue forth without the sanction of Congress, Humbly prays that your Honours would take this important matter into serious consideration & would be pleased to appoint one Member or Members of your Honourable Body to inspect his work so that the same may be published under the Authority of Congress.” Do you know what happened? Congress studied Aitken’s proposal and then approved it on September 12, 1782. Charles Thomson was Secretary of the Continental Congress, and also a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He signed the approval of Aitken’s proposal with this ringing endorsement: “RESOLVED, THAT the United States in Congress assembled highly approve the pious and laudable undertaking of Mr. Aitken, as subservient to the interest of religion, as well as an instance of the progress of arts in this country, and being satisfied from the above report of his care and accuracy in the execution of the work, they recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States, and hereby authorize him to publish this Recommendation in the manner he shall think proper.” It came to be known as the Bible of the Revolution. Of course, that was a different day, when Congress was peopled with statesmen rather than politicians, and when the Bible was not an embarrassment to be seen on the public stage. With an increasing antipathy toward God, society has arrived at the point where the Bible is expected to rest in silence on a shelf, making no impact in Congress, the courts, or the White House. Gone are the days when Congress actively fanned the Bible’s influence. Now, it seems, many of our leaders would do whatever to ensure the Bible holds as little sway as possible—at least in the public square. Jesus Christ said, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). No country, America included, is going to last forever. And when eternal destinies are decided, the basis of judgment will not be our Constitution, a Supreme Court decision, or an executive order. Every one of us will be judged by what Jesus taught, as recorded in the Bible. Come visit us at the Sherman Drive church of Christ, where we still understand the Bible applies equally to every person—even in the Oval Office.

