

I Pledge Allegiance Rabbi Adam J. Bernay

Readings

Torah: Genesis 25:28 – 26:5; Exodus 20:2-5a

Haftarah: 1 Samuel 8:1-22; 1 Kings 8:44-53

Apostolic: Matthew 22:15-22; Ephesians 6:10-20; Romans 13:1-7

In previous years, if you have been with us on the Sabbath closest to American Independence Day, you would've heard me speak about the issue of allegiance. This year, because I will not be with you on that Shabbat, and because I have become convicted even more so on this issue, expanding the views I have expressed previously, I decided to speak to you on this topic today.

Because we are rapidly coming to a crisis in this country, a spiritual crisis most people do not see coming, because they are blinded by the physical crises they see, battles over health care, immigration, oil spills and energy policies, massive crippling deficits and debts incurred by our government... serious issues, yes... but not as serious as the spiritual crisis, in which two stateolatrous cults are arising to contest not just for the physical control of the United States of America, but for the spiritual control of the people therein. And it all centers around the question of allegiance, so I will now give my usual spiel on allegiance and come back to the pending crisis.

Francis Bellamy, a Baptist minister, wrote the original Pledge in August 1892. He was a Christian Socialist. In his Pledge, he is expressing the ideas of his first cousin, Edward Bellamy, author of the American socialist utopian novels, **Looking Backward** (1888) and **Equality** (1897).

His original version read: "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic, for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." Today, of course, the words "under God" have been added... which is ironic, since this pledge is actually emblematic of the turn of this country away from God – unless you mean the god of the State.

The word allegiance is said, but not understood. Let us review definitions of allegiance: the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (online) defines it as "the obligation of a feudal vassal to his liege lord, the fidelity owed by a subject or citizen to a sovereign or government, the obligation of an alien to the government under which the alien resides." Although it lists a secondary definition of, "devotion or loyalty to a person, group, or cause," it is this obligatory fidelity that comes closest to the original definition.

The etymology is said to come Middle English *aligeaunce*, from Anglo-French *allegeance*, alteration of *ligeance*, from *lige* liege. And that's all. Well, let's telescope that back. The term "liege," from which all of this springs in English, is a reference to the feudal system of Europe, where most of the populace were serfs, farmers tied by

obligation to the land where they had been born, land owned by the liege lord, who expected large portions of your produce – or the money from its sale – to be turned over to him. To attempt to leave, in most cases, meant to risk death at the hands of the soldiers of the liege lord, who held his power by virtue of his God-given birthright, according to the preachings of the village priest, whose church and livelihood was financed mostly by... the liege lord. In other words, a system of manor-states with a slave economy, controlled by a theocratically-endorsed tyrant.

This is not surprising, since the original concept of allegiance goes all the way back to the original pledges of allegiance performed by Greek and Roman officers to their generals and the Caesars, because the generals and Caesars were as gods to them.

In Biblical Hebrew, this concept is expressed in the word ***Mishmereth***, which is translated as “allegiance, charge, duties, duty, guard post, guard, guards, keep, keep, kept, obligation, obligations, offices, posts, safe, service, service divisions, watch,” and yes, “worship”! Let’s review uses of ***Mishmereth*** in Tanakh:

Genesis 26:1-5

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. The LORD appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.”

The words “kept” and “charge” are ***Mishmereth***. This shows that allegiance is tied to the charge God has given us. The same word is used about the keeping of the lamb until the 14th of Nisan in the original commandments for Pesach, and in the keeping of the festivals. Some other uses of ***Mishmereth*** in Tanakh include:

Deuteronomy 11:1 – You shall therefore love the LORD your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments.

1 Samuel 22:23 – “Stay with me, do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life; for you are safe with me.” (The word translated “safe” is ***Mishmereth***)

1 Chronicles 12:29 – “Of the sons of Benjamin, Saul's kinsmen, 3,000; for until now the greatest part of them had kept their allegiance to the house of Saul.”

But here they are pledging allegiance to David. Should allegiance change? Many people use this scripture to argue for allegiance to men's governments:

Matthew 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Rabbi, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?"

But Yeshua perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?"

They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.

This is not allegiance. This is support, this is following the laws of the State because we are following Torah. It does not mean, "my country, right or wrong."

Isaiah 45:20-25

"Gather yourselves and come; Draw near together, you fugitives of the nations; They have no knowledge, Who carry about their wooden idol And pray to a god who cannot save. Declare and set forth your case; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness And will not turn back, That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. They will say of Me, 'Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength.' Men will come to Him, And all who were angry at Him will be put to shame. In the LORD all the offspring of Israel Will be justified and will glory."

Others cite this passage, from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, for our allegiance to the secular states around us:

Romans 13:1-7

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

The perspective that this settles the matter – that we are simply to obey the government – assumes this passage is all about civil governing authorities. That is not necessarily the case. In the Greek manuscripts, the word translated as “rulers” is “archone,” which is more often a reference to the religious authorities – rabbis, synagogue officials, members of the Beit Din or Torah Court system, all the way up to and including the Sanhedrin – then it is civil government authorities. Read this way, the passage in context makes much more sense, because, going back to chapter twelve, the passage is all about spiritual government and not about civil government, and it says the rulers are appointed by God, they are servants and ministers of God, and whomever resists them resists also the ordinance of God... and we know that many times – possibly most times – civil governing authorities are not servants of God and do not rule according to the ordinance of God.

In fact, the only time civil government is mentioned in this passage, it really backs up the position that the “rulers” mentioned are the religious and not civil leaders, because it says “For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.” It is a different thought, because paying taxes would already be a part of obedience to the rulers if the rulers were the civil government officials... and the civil government officials didn't pay taxes to themselves, and yet the text says that the rulers, as servants of God, devote themselves or stand ready to do this.

It is a sign that the “rulers” are not the civil government. We then read, “Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.” This indicates that more than one kind of leader is being discussed here, because taxes and customs are not given to the same leaders as fear – only the LORD shall we fear, or awe – and honor.

At least, that is another way to interpret this passage. Whether or not it is the absolutely correct way is not the primary issue. The point is, we cannot simply take this as it is commonly interpreted, to mean obedience, fear, and honor is due to our civil government authorities, that they are appointed by God and are servants and ministers of God.

Certainly, in the ideal case, our civil government authorities would be appointed by God, would be servants of God and ministers of God. But that is hardly the case. To avoid getting into current politics at this point, let me ask you: was Constantine appointed by God, a servant of God, a minister of God? Was Adolf Hitler? Josef Stalin? Chairman Mao? Pol Pot? Do I need to come up with other historical examples? Let's discuss Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany for a minute. Many good Christians in Germany did not resist the Nazis until far too late for this exact reason, that they had been told that our civil government authorities are appointed by God and are servants and ministers of God.

We must be careful to whom our allegiances are given. This is not to say we should flout the laws of the lands in which we live, that we should not have loyalty to the country in which we live, or even that we should not serve in a capacity that would require us to swear – as in the case of our military – to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America or – as in the case of law enforcement officers – take an oath to fairly and impartially enforce the laws under your jurisdiction.

But loyalty and allegiance are not the same thing, as I showed earlier, in that allegiance as defined by man is a religious devotion to a noble or government with the power of a noble. Royalty – and, really, all civil government – has always been a substitution for or an impediment to our allegiance to God, which is why He cautioned us so fully against taking on such in:

1 Samuel 8:4-8

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to him, “Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.” But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” And Samuel prayed to the LORD. The LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day – in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods – so they are doing to you also.

Indeed, when we are out in the Dispersion – as we are – and we find ourselves in trouble, it is not the civil governing authorities we are to turn to, but the Most High, as we read in:

1 Kings 8:46-53

“When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) and You are angry with them and deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near; if they take thought in the land where they have been taken captive, and repent and make supplication to You in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, ‘We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly’; if they return to You with all their

heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who have taken them captive, and pray to You toward their land which You have given to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and the house which I have built for Your name; then hear their prayer and their supplication in heaven Your dwelling place, and maintain their cause, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You, and make them objects of compassion before those who have taken them captive, that they may have compassion on them (for they are Your people and Your inheritance which You have brought forth from Egypt, from the midst of the iron furnace), that Your eyes may be open to the supplication of Your servant and to the supplication of Your people Israel, to listen to them whenever they call to You. For You have separated them from all the peoples of the earth as Your inheritance, as You spoke through Moses Your servant, when You brought our fathers forth from Egypt, O Lord GOD.”

Too many people – too many Believers – turn to our civil government as the arbiter of right and wrong, as if it were functioning as God called for the kings of Israel to function in. But all this clearly shows that our allegiance can only be to God. We can support and defend countries that have shown themselves worthy of our support. But we must clearly remember where our allegiance is supposed to lie: to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to the People called by His Name.

But there is arising in this country two stateolatrous cults that I believe will one day consume most of the American people. Let me first define that word – “stateolatry” is a coined term, meaning worshipping the State (government) as one would an idol. I’ve spoken many times about my concerns about the Left wanting to substitute worship of the State for worship of God. I doubt that most people hearing or reading this teaching need to be convinced of that, but if you do, I have a series of teachings on the topic, please ask me for copies.

But recently, I have become convinced of something I didn’t want to see: that there is a similar stateolatrous cult arising on the Right. It doesn’t claim to revere an all-powerful State, but instead a State whose parameters were given by God Himself, revealed in Sacred Writ that we call the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States; revealed to a group of semi-divine men, the Founding Fathers, who are becoming the subject of the latest form of ancestor worship. This is coming from the Right, from the new Patriot movement, as primarily espoused by its latest prophet, Glenn Beck, who openly speaks of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as Sacred Writ given in Divine Revelation to the Founding Fathers. Anyone who listens or watches him on a regular basis knows he has said this.

He is also endorsing the new form of ancestor worship in his reverence for the Founding Fathers. He has devoted his show every Friday night – the beginning of the Sabbath, interestingly enough! – to going back and looking at the suppressed history of the

Founders. And while everything he says about them is absolutely true, he presents it in a glowing way that completely glosses over their more manifest failings. For example, people watching his special on Benjamin Franklin would learn of Franklin's scientific brilliance, his drive to improve himself, his support of both Christian and Jewish religious institutions... but would never learn that Franklin was also a hard-drinking, hard-partying playboy who was found dead in bed in France with a woman less than a third of his age... this woman was not his wife, who was back at home in America!

As much as I respect Beck for his diligence in exposing the impact of progressivism on America and his support of Israel and the Jews, we must keep in mind when hearing his pronouncements about America that he is a Mormon, and at root Mormon theology is a Replacement Theology in every possible sense, even replacing the physical Land of Israel with America, that America is the New Israel, and that the Messiah's return will be that of a human politician riding into Washington D.C. figuratively on a white horse to set this government right. And it is on this Americentric foundation that he has set this new Patriot movement.

Now, I do not condemn individual members of either the Patriot or Progressive movements. I don't believe they understand where this is all going. I don't know that I even blame all their leaders, even Beck, who may have been brainwashed by the LDS Church. Why don't I blame them? Because we are told flatout in the Bible that they are not our enemies:

Ephesians 6:10-12

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Remember that, as we proceed into the next few years, because it will become ever more apparent.