

JULY 5, 2021

MEMBERS BIBLE STUDY ~ UNITED STATES CAPITAL



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*Missouri Rep. and Assistant
Majority Floor Leader*

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What Does the Bible Teach in Regard to Property Rights?



The Bible is pro private property rights. Many passages support this stance. Accordingly, all governments—locally, nationally, and worldwide—should protect private property rights. God knows that personal ownership of private property is fundamental to every individual's ability to express his best possible self as a reflection of his being created in God's image. In addition, private property rights are fundamental to personal and national fruitfulness. Read on, my friend, and learn more about how you can defend such beliefs based upon what God has said in His Word.

Ralph Drollinger

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✓ ENDORSEMENT

Hannah Kelly

Missouri Rep. and Assistant
Majority Floor Leader
District 141



“My faith reminds me that serving in this building [Missouri State Capitol] is a privilege and I can’t do it without the help and guidance of God. Our nation was founded by people who understood this as well. I’m grateful to Capitol Ministries for bringing legislators together to encourage one another in their faith and remind each other that no matter where God may call each of us He will provide the resources to help us succeed.”

— HANNAH KELLEY

Rep. Kelly attends the discipleship Bible study that is led weekly by Pastor Matt Goodsell to members of the Missouri Legislature.

What Does the Bible Teach in Regard to Property Rights?

I. INTRODUCTION

The biblically based political ideology of private property ownership stands in absolute and distinct contradiction to the political ideology of communism. As Karl Marx said in his *Communist Manifesto*, “The theory of the Communists may be summed up in a single sentence: the abolition of private property.” If the ideology of private property rights is the main difference between capitalism and communism, how can you reason and form convictions about this matter from Scripture?

What passages come to mind so as to substantiate that God is pro private property? Another way to look at this issue is the opposite: Saying you are anti-communist is one thing, but can you reason why from Scripture?

Every believer should be able to present a solid basis for being pro private property rights (and therein capitalism, in general) via the use of God’s Word. This study is designed to aid you in that quest and to help you form personal and political convictions that are riveted upon God’s guidance as explicated in and from His Revelation.

Before building a scriptural case for private property and capitalism, the precedent that God is the ultimate owner of everything must first be investigated.

II. PASSAGE ON GOD’S ULTIMATE OWNERSHIP OF ALL PROPERTY

Scripture teaches that God is the ultimate owner of the earth and all that is therein—not communist governments—and that He desires *individuals* to be His stewards of His creation.

“The earth is the LORD’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it” (Psalm 24:1).

“Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it” (Deuteronomy 10:14).

In granting man stewardship responsibilities of that which He ultimately owns, He has specifically entrusted managerial responsibilities to the top of His creative order: Man, who, unlike any other aspect of His creation, He created in His image. This fundamental intention is conveyed in Genesis 1:26–28:

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

Incumbent in man’s stewardship role over all of creation, God uses the descriptive word *subdue* (*kabash*) to encompass what he specifically desires for man to do: This Hebrew word *kabash* specifically means “to bring into servitude.” In Numbers 32:22–29 and Joshua 18:1, this same word is used in a parallel contextual meaning: Israel is to *subdue* the land of Canaan for the land to serve Israel. Importantly, the contextual usage of *kabash* as used in this Genesis 1 passage pertains to God’s instructing those in His creation who are made in His image to discover, understand, develop, utilize, and enjoy all of the earth’s overabundant resources. Importantly implied in God’s command to man is this: Man is to carry out His God-appointed stewardship responsibilities with respect and thanksgiving to Him.

Having first established this principle of God’s ultimate ownership, the following



point need now be made: Even though God is the ultimate owner of everything, Scripture repeatedly communicates—*“it is said,”* and this directive will be seen in the passages that follow—that the property belongs to His stewards, i.e., individuals.

Emphasis needs to be placed on the word *individuals*, which is in direct opposition to the idea of God’s conveying property ownership to a government, a society or a nation as a whole. This conveyance of ownership by God to man in specificity is evidenced in the following passages:

III. PASSAGES ON PERSONAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

A myriad of Scriptures evidence God’s expectation of personal ownership of His property versus implications of governmental or societal ownership of His property. The following are only representative of the many.

A. THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not steal.”

Exodus 20:15 presumes that people own something that can be stolen. For instance, I cannot take my neighbor’s donkey because it *belongs* to my neighbor. Or as a modern example includes intellectual property. You cannot search through my email files and give them to whomever you choose unbeknownst to me; to do so is to steal another’s property.

B. THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” Exodus 20:17 above, addresses the heart. *Covet* (*chamad*) in this Hebrew passage and *epithumeo* in

Greek (cf. Romans 7:7) means “a strong desire; wantonness.” Used in this context, *covet* is the desire to take from another what rightfully *belongs* to him.

Note specifically that the passage does not say those things *belong* to the community or the government; three times the passage uses the word *neighbor* (*rea*) meaning “a person, friend, or fellow.” Again, the passage reveals that the *ox* or *donkey* is not owned by a government, but by a person, friend, or fellow: that is to whom God says it *belongs*.

C. IRRESPONSIBLE OWNERSHIP

“If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death.”

Exodus 21:29 uses the word *owner* (*baal*) in relation to the bad behaving *ox*. This is an example of an irresponsible owner. Further and important, this passage reveals that to own something means you are legally connected to it, to the extent that one can be found personally liable for damages caused by something he owns. Today, such laws stemming from the Torah, i.e., the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and its assumption of personal property rights prove to be very motivational to owners. These laws lead to being a good manager! Such laws generate personal asset management skills and its upside: the creation of excellent value-added products. Sadly, such ensuing motivations for creating excellent products and services are not achieved in communist nations where personal property rights and personal property liability do not exist.

Once I toured my friend’s value-added fresh corn packaging facility. Every night a crew came in to sterilize the plant to eliminate

♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

Psalm 24:1

*“The earth is the Lord’s,
and all it contains,
the world, and those
who dwell in it.”*

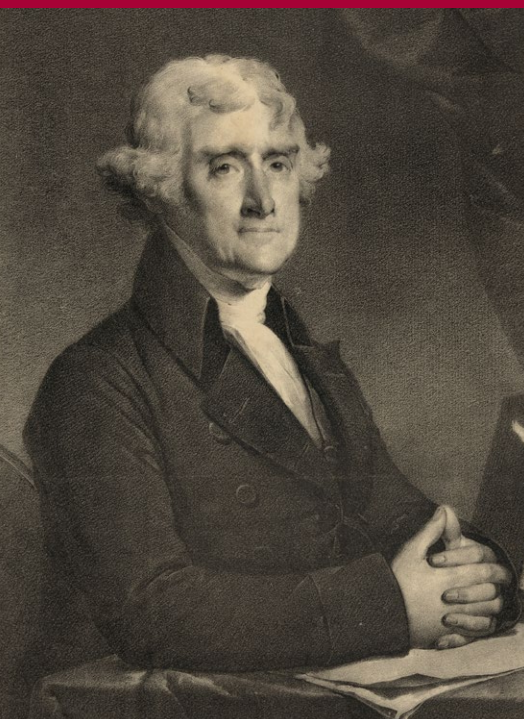


God is the ultimate owner of the earth and all that is therein. He desires individuals to be His good stewards of it.





Thomas Jefferson



“A wise and frugal government, which shall leave men free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned—this is the sum of good government.”

— Thomas Jefferson, third President of the United States, signer of the Declaration of Independence, diplomat, Governor of Virginia, Secretary of State.

Thomas Jefferson, “First Inaugural Address,” 1801.

E. coli and other possible bacterial contaminants—all of which could harm a consumer. I wager to say he would not be so motivated if he did not himself own the corn nor ultimately be liable for the product’s safety. In fact, history testifies to the fact that communist states do not last. The lack of personal responsibility and the ensuing motivation that stems from the pride of personal ownership is the reason why.

D. MOVING A LANDMARK

“You shall not move your neighbor’s boundary mark, which the ancestors have set....” Deuteronomy 19:14 speaks to the sin of moving land **boundaries**. What infraction is committed if the land is not owned by another person? Proverbs 23:10 adds to this understanding:

“Do not move the ancient boundary or go into the fields of the fatherless.”

Each segment of this proverb concerning private property ownership serves to give insight into the meaning of the other. Attempting to steal another person’s property because of his inability to defend what is rightfully his is unjust and wrong.

E. THE YEAR OF THE JUBILEE

“You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family” (Leviticus 25:10).

This subject of property rights becomes increasingly interesting with the introduction of this Scripture. Even capitalism and personal property ownership is not a perfect national economic system in a fallen world (I am afraid that as proud Americans we are often guilty of thinking that capitalism is a perfect system of governance): Always keep in mind that no economic system is perfect in a fallen world!

Churchill once quipped, “Democracy is the worst form of government, except all the others!” Only when Christ returns and sets up His rule as the King of Kings will there be a perfect government on the earth.

The Old Testament (OT) book of Leviticus informs the reader that every 50 years Israel’s people were to hit the restart button on their personal property/capitalistic-based economy. Akin to playing Monopoly today wherein one or two players in time will monopolize all the properties, in a fallen world some people inevitably become economic juggernauts while others less gifted or competitive can and will fall to the wayside. Some are not as strong or able as others and cannot compete or gain wealth even though they live in a personal-property-based culture. This seeming inequity is one of those realities of living in a fallen world.

Personal property ownership is not a perfect cure-all in a fallen world but nonetheless is a better basis for economic prosperity than all other alternatives. Relative to this week’s study, the point to be underscored from Leviticus 25:10 is not how the Year of Jubilee should or should not apply in America today. I want to pinpoint this section: ***“each of you shall return to his own property.”*** As in the other aforementioned passages, God’s endorsement of an economy with **his own property** (even with its faults) is in view here.

F. A SUMMARY OF PASSAGES ON PERSONAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

The Bible speaks repeatedly regarding the economic creation and well-being of a nation and how that best occurs in what will always be until Christ returns, an unfair, disproportionately talented, fallen world. The best system, says God’s Word, is via a government based upon and allowing personal, private property rights. With the inclusion of the Year of the Jubilee (an occasional adjustment mechanism in a private property



economic structure), it is safe to say that God is a capitalist—not a communist.

These five passages illustrate and affirm that one of God's fundamental principles for government is to grant private property ownership rights to individuals.

The economic principle that stems from the Torah is this: necessary for achieving a proper functioning, fruitful and prosperous nation in a material sense is personal property ownership. (The Bible does not deem material things as evil; such thinking is a faulty dualism and the subject of other studies.) To violate God's principle of private ownership, that is, to enact some form or level of communism in a state is patently unbiblical and will ultimately lead to the demise of a nation's motivation, economic engine, growth, and overall material well-being of its people.

IV. THE NATURAL TENDENCY OF GOVERNMENT TO OVERREACH

In a greater-than-just-material-concerns sense, God has ordained four other separate institutions that He intends to function simultaneously and independently of government in order to best achieve His purposes and herald the riches of His grace (cf. Ephesians 2:7) in a fallen world prior to His Second Coming.

Government is only one of five co-equal institutions. And within that spectrum, each institution has God-given responsibilities that it does better than could any of the others. For example, what government does best is suppress evil. But keep in mind the other four institutions, i.e., marriage, family, commerce and the church, do what they do better than government! Government cannot accomplish for a nation what the other four institutions can and do achieve much more expeditiously and efficiently.

- Marriage *promulgates*.
- The family *cultivates*.
- Commerce *invigorates*.
- The church *translates*.

Those theological pillars of institutional understanding are fundamental to a biblical worldview and serve to qualify the role of government.

Given this contextualization and the focus of this study, the following is also in view: The institution of government is always on the prowl, desiring to play in the sandbox of every other institution and makes a mess whenever it does! Left to roam, this institution soon wanders outside of its God-designed purpose:

- It perverts marriage.
- It stymies the family.
- It encroaches on the church.
- And left to its self-centered ways, it begins to overstep commerce—by eroding or attacking private property rights!

Government, it seems, finds the physique of Jabba the Hutt to be attractive! Left unchecked, government will eclipse God's separate institution of commerce, which must possess personal property rights in order to flourish institutionally and materially invigorate a nation.

The preponderance of government is nothing new. The Prophet Samuel spoke to Israel about the increasing pervasive nature of civil administrations when Israel first mentioned the idea to him that they wanted their own king. The prophet sagely responded to the nation Israel in 1 Samuel 8:10–18:

“So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king. He said, ‘This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. He will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and

George Mason



“All men are created equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity: among which are the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing the obtaining happiness and safety.”

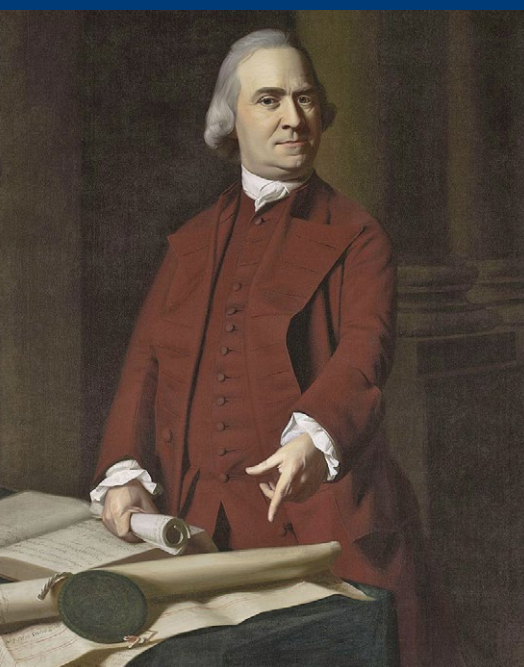
— George Mason, delegate at the Constitutional Convention, Father of the Bill of Rights, American patriot, statesman.

George Mason: “First draft, Virginia Declaration of Rights,” 1776.





Samuel Adams



“Among the natural rights of the Colonists are these: First, a right to life; Secondly, to liberty; Thirdly, to property; together with the right to support and defend them in the best manner they can. These are evident branches of, rather than deductions from, the duty of self-preservation, commonly called the first law of nature.”

— Samuel Adams, signer of the Declaration of Independence, Father of the American Revolution, ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, Governor of Massachusetts.

Samuel Adams, “The Rights of the Colonists,” November 20, 1772.

offfifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys and use them for his work. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

When government goes unchecked, it begins to **take** from the people, confiscating more and more for itself. The word **take** appears *six times* in this passage! Be on guard: Runaway government is normative in a fallen world!

Therefore, as exegetically substantiated in the previous point, God’s blueprint for a nation’s people—not its government—is to possess the bulk of property and wealth of the nation. It, therefore, follows that, according to the Bible, government must be kept in check, otherwise, the institution will begin to think it can achieve for its people tasks that are better suited for fulfillment by God’s other ordained institutions.

The role of government is limited to and most efficient when:

- **Rewarding those who do good**, i.e., in part those who provide jobs for others due to their giftedness should be rewarded and not penalized so as to encourage them to create more jobs and wealth for the nation.
- **Punishing those who do evil**, i.e., provide a strong judicial system internally and a strong military force externally

(cf. Romans 13:1–8; 1 Peter 2:13–14).

When government begins to step outside of its biblically specific purposes, it becomes vast, ghastly and monstrously inefficient, resulting in the eventual, if not immediate, eclipse of its citizenry and their liberties, thereby lessening their personal abilities and resourcefulness to reflect the attributes of God to others.

V. PERU, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND POVERTY

The nation of Peru is a good example of how the violation of private property principles entraps a nation in poverty. The denial of private property rights does not always rest on the shoulders of communist ideology; sometimes it results in supposed capitalistic countries such as Peru (what I call *CINO* countries—“Capitalist In Name Only”).

The brilliant work of Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto serves to substantiate the aforementioned biblical principle of private property and its absence being the root cause of poverty. When governments hoard private property by making their attainment next to impossible, they stymie the creation of wealth in their own nation. Such policies are extremely shortsighted. The root cause of poverty is this: with no ability to gain working capital due to a lack of collateral from property ownership, a person cannot enter the capital market and germinate a product or a service. When Desoto’s team attempted to build a house in Peru, they were forced to go through an elaborate process:

To obtain legal authorization to build a house on state-owned land took six years and eleven months, requiring 207 administrative steps in 52 government offices...To obtain a legal title for that piece of land took 728 [additional] steps.

Regarding DeSoto’s similar attempt to obtain a permit to build a small garment



workshop on the outskirts of Lima, Wayne Grudem, seminary professor and author states:

They worked at the registration process six hours a day, and it took them 289 days! The cost was the equivalent of \$1,231 USD, or 31 times the monthly minimum wage equivalent (approximately three years' salary) for the ordinary person living in Peru.

In addition, our Capitol Ministries ministry leader in Peru informs me that all too often, due to a lack of integrity and corruption in the title industry, property titles are often found to be illegitimate.

Desoto has also documented similar roadblocks in the countries of Egypt, Philippines, and Haiti. Property ownership is next to impossible in many developing nations, thereby trapping its citizenry in poverty! It is as if these country's citizens are living in a communist country. *This is not God's design for a nation!* Such backward, biblically negligent manifest governmental ideology serves to illustrate the wisdom of God's ways. As with the American government land giveaway of 1889, wherein the individual's prospered from private property rights, so does the whole of the nation and its administration.

Unfortunately, however, as America jettisons its trust in the Torah, it follows that there would be and are increasing threats to, and the erosion of private property ownership.

VI. AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTALISM, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND POVERTY

After taking ten years to develop and after only 25 years of operation, the San Onofre nuclear power plant in San Clemente, California, closed due to incessant lawsuits

and subsequent delays caused by environmentalist groups. The executive of *Southern California Edison*, the utility company championing the project, concluded that San Onofre would be their utility's last sortie into the nuclear power arena. As a result, the utility has not attempted to build another power plant on its own private property.

When the environmentalists and their choking, imbalanced regulations descended on the logging industry in the Northwest, claiming the spotted owl (a facsimile to the California spotted owl, which is in abundant supply) was an endangered species, they strangled the industry. Fifty thousand jobs later, owners can no longer harvest lumber at will.

In Santa Cruz, California, environmentalist policies make it impossible for a homeowner to trim the trees on his own private property—even when their overgrowth becomes a serious fire threat or frequently cause power outages during rainy, windy weather due to limbs falling on power lines.

These three cameos serve to illustrate the encroachment of government on private property.

In California, where our family has resided for three generations, a huge stagnation in development (especially compared to Texas) has ensued since the adoption of *Environmental Impact Reports* and abiding by their requirements. Even though private property rights exist in the United States, the bottom line is that the economic benefits God intends from private property ownership have been greatly diminished—similar to those of Peru. Viewed through the lens of the ability of an owner to develop his private property, in essence, the government has become the owner of the land! What a huge philosophical about-face from the days of the Great Oklahoma Land Rush wherein the American gov-

ernment gifted land to its citizenry! The present overly regulatory policies of our nation's government, biblically speaking, are and represent the recipe for the road to poverty.

Additional erosion of private property rights occurred during the tenure of former President Clinton when he issued executive order 13061 whereby ten additional rivers per year will become federal property—even if they flow through private land. Both former Presidents Clinton and Obama enacted orders that confiscated millions of acres of private land that have been effectively removed from private use forever. Fortunately, former President Trump enacted orders to reverse this trend. In summary of this point:

The private ownership of land best serves the continuing prosperity of any nation!

One only need study or visit regressive Russia or inalterable India, though being lands of plentiful natural resources, reveal countries inexorably caught in the plight of poverty. Their cultures have not embraced what the Torah teaches concerning private property rights! Israel on the other hand, a much younger nation informed by the Torah, has experienced huge economic development in a relatively short period of time. Therein lies the difference between nations of similar resources. No wonder Thomas Jefferson said that the United States would be different: "The true foundation of republican government is the equal right of every citizen in his person and property, and in their management."¹

It is hard to imagine that our nation would ever even contemplate changing horses after having ridden an Old Testament stallion for so long—and having experienced the absolutely incomparable thrill of successfully riding it for so many years!



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What Does the Bible Teach in Regard to Property Rights?

VII. BIG GOVERNMENT, PERSONAL LIBERTY AND REFLECTING THE IMAGE OF GOD

A growing government eclipses personal liberty which, in part, includes private property ownership. And as personal liberties diminish, so does an individual's ability to reflect the glory of God to others. What do I mean? One example is personal wealth. When an individual prospers, he has more to share with others: He has the opportunity to reflect, in this case, the grace of God by giving to the needs of others who are less fortunate, manifesting God's attribute of care and compassion. Often such expressions of love lead to the gospel and another's salvation! This is in juxtaposition to government's taxing the wealth of individuals, thereby denuding them of their personal resourcefulness with the belief that it can meet the needs of others more effectively. In truth, God did not ordain government to play this role, and bureaucracy is woefully wasteful, impersonal, and inefficient when it attempts to meet the *real* needs of individual citizens—especially their spiritual needs for regeneration, new life, and victory over sin in Christ!

A government that follows its God-ordained job description: *“for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right”* (1 Peter 2:14) achieves what other institutions cannot. This kind of government simultaneously empowers its citizens with individual liberty to reflect the glory of God to other people.

VIII. SUMMARY

The right to personal property, also known as free enterprise or *capitalism*, is the governmental economic system supported by the Word of God. Scripture does not support communism. Whereas a nation with free enterprise leads to a prosperous nation, a communistic nation leads to a poverty-stricken nation. Historic America and modern-day Israel serve as wonderful illustrations of this biblical axiom. Accordingly, as lawmakers, do not make an ideological shift at this point in our history! Do not jettison our prosperous past that has been so beautifully informed and made possible by adherence to the Mosaic Law contained in the Torah regarding personal property rights!

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San Jose, Costa Rica
Suva, Fiji
Tegucigalpa, Honduras
Vilnius, Lithuania
Warsaw, Poland
Yamoussoukro, Cote d'Ivoire
Yaoundé, Cameroon

1. Thomas Jefferson, “Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval (July 12, 1816)” *Writings: Auto-biography/Notes on the State of Virginia/Public and Private Papers/Addresses/Letters* ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1398.

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