

Lesson Twenty-Seven

Ratifying the Constitution

LESSON IDEA

To show how carefully the Constitution was scrutinized by individual Americans prior to ratification, and why the first ten amendments (Bill of Rights) were deemed necessary.

PREPARATION

Review lessons 24–26 prior to discussing the questions posed in the first part of tonight's lesson. Read "During the Week" and decide how to adapt the assignments suggested in *Your Rugged Constitution* to the needs of your family.

IN SEPTEMBER 1787, the Philadelphia State House was the focus of every American's attention. Fifty-five men had assembled there in May to decide on a form of government for the new nation. They met in the same room of the same building where patriots of similar vision had gathered in the summer of 1776 to decide whether the 13 colonies should submit to the dictates of the English King or fight for their independence.

Do you recall what happened in 1776? [Richard Henry Lee of Virginia proposed that of all ties with England be dissolved and that the colonies become free and independent states. The delegates approved the Lee Resolution, which became the official Declaration of Independence, on July 2nd. The final draft of the Declaration, largely the work of Thomas Jefferson, was adopted on July 4th.]

During the 11 years after the Declaration of Independence was signed, a war was fought, the British were defeated, and independence was established. Now, a permanent government was

needed — one that would preserve the independence of the states, yet give the fledgling nation sufficient strength to remain united and defend itself against such foreign powers as England, France, and Spain.

Delegates to the Constitutional Convention devised an ingenious solution. What form of government did they design? [Review points made in last week's lesson on republics and democracies.]

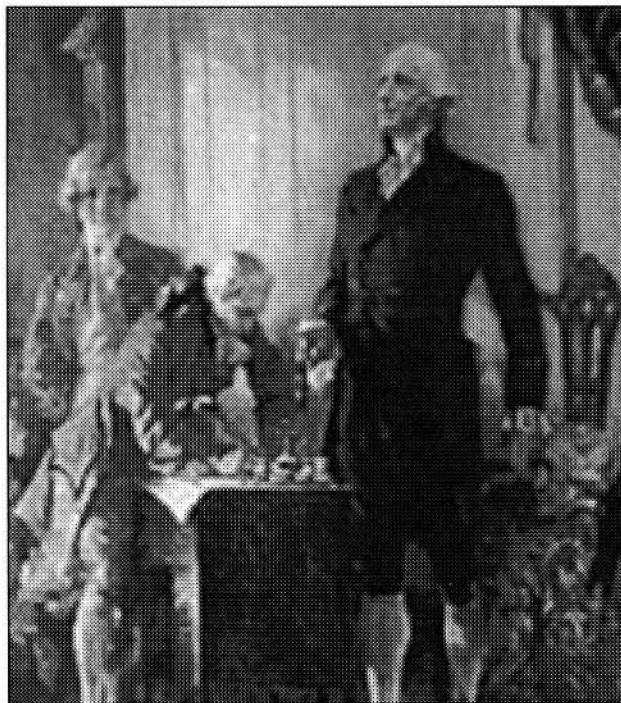
How did they preserve the independence of small states? [Review lesson 24 on the Constitutional Convention, explaining how both large and small state have equal representation in the Senate, while large states have more representatives in the House.]

What was the power of the federal government to be restrained? [Review lesson 25 on checks and balances, emphasizing the division of government authority into three branches — legislative, executive, and judicial.]

There were some leaders, even at the Philadelphia Convention, who believed that the federal government was still too powerful, or that it might become so. Edmund Randolph, Elbridge Gerry, and James Mason refused to sign the Constitution they had helped draft, due

to sundry flaws they perceived. Randolph, in particular, strongly believed that any corrections should be made before, not after, the state ratification process. "A bad feature in government," he argued, "becomes more and more fixed every day."

Based on what we know about government today, would you agree or disagree with Randolph's concern? [Encourage discussion. An



Washington at the Signing of the Constitution, 1787

U.S. House of Representatives

