

## Did the Solemn League and Covenant Bind the United States after Independence?

Samuel 8:6-7; 1 Samuel 12:19-22

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We have now come to the point in the biblical and historical development of our argument where we inquire whether the Colonies (or rather States) continued to be bound by the *Solemn League and Covenant* (and the moral principles found therein) after they declared their independence from Great Britain on July 4, 1776? Having already demonstrated in past sermons that the British Colonies (as Dominions of the Crown of Britain) were bound by the *Solemn League and Covenant* of 1643, did the descending obligation owed to God to uphold the *Solemn League and Covenant* cease once the Colonies declared their independence from British rule in 1776? Let us first consider the Scriptural text before us, and then we will consider more closely the question before us.

### I. An Alteration in the Form of Government Does Not Alter a National Covenant Made with God (1 Samuel 8:6-7; 1 Samuel 12:19-22).

A. We have already established from previous sermons that the National Covenant made between Israel and God (at Mt. Sinai) did not cease when the people of Israel were removed from their homeland in Palestine, carried captive into various parts of the world, and incorporated into various nations (Deuteronomy 29:25 and Deuteronomy 30:1-3). They were still called God's covenant people, for the Lord is not simply the God of a particular piece of real estate in Palestine, but is the omnipresent God of the whole world ("The earth is the LORD'S, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" Psalm 24:1). There is no escaping God and the rights and duties owed to Him no matter where we may go or flee in this world (as Jonah learned when he sought to flee from the Lord). So likewise the rights and duties owed to God by British subjects bound by the *Solemn League and Covenant* did not end simply because they left the shores of Britain and sailed across the Atlantic to North America to form Dominions under the Crown of Britain.

B. Moreover, we have also established from previous sermons that the National Covenant made between God and Israel (at Mt. Sinai) did not cease when the ten tribes declared their independence from the United Kingdom of Israel and formed themselves into a new nation with a new constitution under King Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:26-33). The ten tribes of Israel continued to be the people of God because of the National Covenant made between God and their fathers at Mt. Sinai (as is demonstrated in 1 Kings 16:1-3 where Jehu is said to be the *de facto* prince "over **MY** people Israel"). So likewise the descending obligation of the *Solemn League and Covenant* between God and the posterity of Britain did not cease when they declared their independence from the United Kingdom of Britain and formed themselves into a new nation with a new constitution. To the contrary, that same posterity continued to be bound to the *Solemn League and Covenant*; for they were not a different moral person after forming a new nation with a new constitution, but were essentially **the same moral person before God** with simply a **new political identity before man** (they went from being the Colonies of Britain to the United States of America). Although their political connection to Britain might be altered, their moral/covenantal connection to God could not be altered.

C. Now as we consider our Scriptural text this Lord's Day, we note that altering the form of government from a decentralized judgeship to a centralized kingship within Israel, and more importantly altering the form of government from God being their King to a man being their king, did not abrogate the National Covenant between God and Israel made at Mt. Sinai.

1. Let us first observe that the Lord had ordained in the National Covenant between God and Israel that He, the Great God of heaven and earth, was King of Israel. Other nations had kings, but not Israel. God gave Israel judges such as Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and Samuel. Why? Because Jehovah God wanted Israel to know that He was Israel's covenanted King whose throne was in heaven and whose footstool was upon earth (as evidenced by the Ark of the Covenant which contained the National Covenant between God and Israel). Note that Samuel, the last judge of Israel, and that God Himself viewed this demand of Israel to have a human king to be a direct attack against God Himself in 1 Samuel 8:4-7 ("for they have not rejected thee, but **they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them**" 1 Samuel 8:7). Samuel testified against Israel's sin of desiring a human king in 1 Samuel 12:12, "And when you saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us; **when the LORD your God was your king.**" Even Israel confessed their own sin in asking for a human king like all of the nations around them in 1 Samuel 12:19 ("for we have added unto all our sins **this evil, to ask us a king**"). Thus, although God did give Israel a king when the covenant between God and Israel was established at Mt. Sinai, God did give Israel a king in His anger ("I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath" Hosea 13:11). Let us not look back from our present perspective in history to this alteration in the form of government within Israel and somehow minimize how serious and radical (from God's perspective, Samuel's perspective, and Israel's perspective) this alteration was in the form of government God established with Israel in their National Covenant at Mt. Sinai. This was a monumental change from how Israel was originally ruled. But did such a radical change in the form of government alter the descending obligation of the National Covenant between God and Israel at Mt. Sinai whereby Israel as a nation was covenanted to be the people of God? Let us see.

2. Secondly, we hear God's most gracious words given through Samuel to Israel (in spite of Israel's great sin) in 1 Samuel 12:22: "For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: **because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people.**" The Lord continued to be in covenant with His people even when He is rejected as being Israel's sole King. The National Covenant stands firm. Israel is God's people and the Lord is Israel's God by covenant. Outward circumstances in every way imaginable may be altered and changed for a covenanted people, but one thing that cannot be dissolved is a covenant relationship with God. That covenanted people may despise the covenant with God; that covenanted people may trample underfoot, burn, and rescind by human laws the covenant with God; that covenanted people in succeeding generations may not consent to the covenant with God that their forefathers made; that covenanted people may be moved to another part of the world and incorporated into another nation; that covenanted people may reconstitute, reorganize, and declare their independence from their fatherland; that covenanted people may drastically rewrite the form of government under which they now exist; but, dear ones, that covenanted people (as a moral person) cannot remove themselves from covenant with God. They will either be covenant-breakers, or they will be covenant-keepers. But cease to be a covenanted people? That they cannot do. The covenant of God binds them and their posterity in all succeeding generations; the only question is whether they will love or hate that holy covenant and whether they will love or hate the God of that holy covenant.

3. I hope you see the relevance (in this as well as past sermons) of laying out these many acts of unfaithfulness on Israel's part as a covenanted nation. If Israel through all of these acts of unfaithfulness and through all the alterations to their legal and political identity could not dissolve a covenant between them and God, then neither can any other nation do so. For covenanting with God or covenanting in God's name is not a distinctly Jewish principle. It is a universal moral principle firmly embedded in the moral law of God ("Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" Exodus 20:7), and as such, it is applicable to all nations. As we have noted from previous sermons, God also owns not only Israel, but also owns Gentile nations that engage themselves in a National Covenant to be His people (as is true of Egypt and Assyria in Isaiah 19:18-25). Thus, if

Israel as a covenanted nation cannot dissolve the covenant between themselves and God, then neither can Egypt, Assyria, England, Ireland, Scotland, the United States, Canada or any other covenanted nation dissolve the National Covenant between themselves and God regardless of their covenant-breaking, or relocating to a different part of the world, or declaring their independence from the fatherland, or reconstituting themselves under a new or different constitution, or reorganizing themselves under a radically different form of government than they previously had. The outward circumstances and **political identity before man** may change in radical ways, but **the moral identity before God** of those nations and their posterity cannot change.

## II. Did the *Solemn League and Covenant* Continue to Bind the United States after They Declared Their Independence from Britain?

A. We now come to this most critical question. The answer to that question hinges upon whether the same moral person (considered as the posterity of Britain) that was bound by the *Solemn League and Covenant* on July 3, 1776 (the day before the Declaration of Independence) continued in its essence after independence from Britain was declared on July 4, 1776? Was there the death and burial of one moral person (i.e. the posterity of Britain) and the creation of an entirely new moral person on July 4, 1776? Or rather was there a continuity of the same moral person (the posterity of Britain) from one political identity to another political identity? In other words, was it the moral person that died and a new one created on July 4, 1776, or was it the political identity of the same moral person that died and a new political identity of the same moral person that was created on July 4, 1776? I firmly believe that both biblical and historical evidence confirms that it was not a **new moral person before God** that was created on July 4, 1776 when independence from Britain was declared, but rather that a **new political/legal identity before man** that was created on July 4, 1776. This leads us to ask another important question.

B. What is a moral person?

1. An individual is a moral person because he is accountable to God and to the moral law of God (Romans 3:23). An individual as a moral person is bound by lawful covenants made with God (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6). An individual as a moral person cannot escape the obligation of God's moral law wherever he might live or however his outward circumstances might change. His **legal identity before man** may even change if he changes his name or his citizenship, but he cannot change his **moral person before God**. That individual is the same moral person throughout his whole life, and he is and will be judged as a moral person by God (Romans 1:18; Revelation 20:11-12).

2. Likewise a nation and its posterity (whether Jewish or Gentile) is also a moral person before God because it is likewise accountable to God and to the moral law of God for its actions and decisions (Psalm 9:17; Psalm 33:12; Isaiah 37:16; Jeremiah 10:7). A nation and its posterity is a moral person, and as such, it can also be bound by lawful covenants with God throughout its generations (whether it be Israel as in Jeremiah 11:10, or whether it be Gentile nations as in Isaiah 19:18-25 and Amos 1:9-10—in Amos 1:9-10, even a Gentile nation that engages in a “brotherly covenant” with Israel is judged as a moral person; how much more so when a Gentile nation engages in a National Covenant with God?). Likewise, a nation and its posterity (as a moral person) cannot escape the obligation of God's moral law (including covenants made with God), regardless of where the posterity might relocate to or regardless of the change in the political identity of that posterity in declaring its independence from the fatherland and in forming a new nation with a new constitution. **The political identity of a nation and its posterity before man may change, but the moral identity of a nation and its posterity before God cannot change as long as any posterity survives.** The Colonies in changing their political identity before man from British Colonies to the United States (on July 4, 1776) could no more legitimately deny that they were still the posterity of Britain than the son of English parents could legitimately deny he was the posterity of British ancestry even if he legally rejected his parents,

and legally changed his name, his home and his citizenship. And not only are individuals judged by God as a moral person, but also nations and their posterity (whether Jewish or Gentile) are judged as moral persons as well (Exodus 7-12, Amos 1:9-10; Matthew 25:31-32—where we see that it is not mere individuals that are gathered before the throne of Christ’s judgment, but “nations” as well).

3. Not only does Scripture declare the moral person of nations and posterity, but even a Thomas Jefferson (an enlightenment skeptic to biblical revelation and biblical orthodoxy) had some understanding of this concept as indicated in letters that he wrote.

A nation, as a society, forms a **moral person**, and every member of it is personally responsible for his society (Thomas Jefferson to George Hammond, 1792).

It is strangely absurd to suppose that a million of human beings, collected together, are not under **the same moral laws** which bind each of them separately (Thomas Jefferson to George Logan, 1816).

C. Now we come to this question: What historical evidence demonstrates that the United States did not create a new moral person before God (but rather a new political identity before man) on July 4, 1776 when independence from Britain was declared? Let’s compare how the British Colonies before the Declaration of Independence and the United States after the Declaration of Independence conducted themselves in civil actions and decisions. Did the United States act as though they had not existed as a moral person prior to the Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776), or rather did they act as though they had existed previously as a moral person? Let’s consider first the **ACTIONS** of the newly formed United States, and then the **WORDS** of the newly formed United States.

1. The **ACTIONS** of the newly formed United States.

a. **The Second Continental Congress** began May 10, 1775 and was disbanded March 1, 1781. In other words, the same Continental Congress that existed over a year before the signing and publishing of the Declaration of Independence (from May 10, 1775 to July 4, 1776) also continued to exist after the signing and publishing of the Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776 to March 1, 1781). I ask you, did the States and the Continental Congress understand they were essentially the same moral person before and after July 4, 1776, or did they rather understand they were essentially a new moral person that did not exist until July 4, 1776? Clearly, they believed their political identity had changed (from British Colonies to the United States), but just as clearly they believed they were essentially the same moral person functioning in a civil capacity by the fact that after July 4, 1776 they continued the same Continental Congress with the same members of that Congress, with the same Committees, and even with the same President of that Congress (John Hancock). How could that be so if the old moral person died, and an entirely new moral person was created on July 4, 1776?

b. Likewise, it should be noted that it was before the Declaration of Independence was signed and published on July 4, 1776 that the Second Continental Congress established the Continental Army with George Washington appointed as its Commander-in-Chief (on June 14, 1775), established the Continental Navy (on November 28, 1775), created Continental Currency (resolved by Congress on June 22, 1775), secretly established foreign relations with countries especially for the purpose of providing arms and ammunition through the Committee of Secret Correspondence (November 1775), established the United States Postal Service with the first Postmaster General, Benjamin Franklin (July 26, 1775), borrowed money and accumulated war debt, took economic steps to restrict trade with Britain—all of these many actions and decisions of the Continental Congress I have just enumerated continued unabated without any change after the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. These are not the actions of a civil body that believes an

entirely new moral person began on July 4, 1776 which did not exist on July 3, 1776. It is true that a new political identity before man was created on July 4, 1776, but not a new moral person before God!

2. The **WORDS** of the newly formed United States.

a. I would draw your attention to **the Declaration of Independence** itself and the words found in it in order to further demonstrate that even this founding document makes it clear that it was not a **new moral person before God** that was created/declared by this document, but rather a **new political or legal identity before man** that was established and called the United States of America. All one need do in examining the Declaration of Independence is to count the number of times that the pronouns, “we”, “us”, and “our” occur in this document (48 times), and then note that the use of these pronouns in this document refers to the existence of this people as both British Colonies and as the United States of America. Why is that important? It demonstrates that the signers of the Declaration of Independence as the official representatives of the United States understood that they were essentially the same moral person before the Declaration of Independence as they were after the Declaration of Independence. If **WE** as a people now declare **OUR** independence from Britain due to the flagrant and continuous moral wrongs committed against **US** when **WE** were British Colonies, then it must mean that the same moral person existed before as existed after the Declaration of Independence.

b. Consider these three examples from the Declaration of Independence.

He [i.e. the king—GLP] has kept among **US**, in times of peace, standing armies without the consent of **OUR** legislature.

Here the Continental Congress in the very document that declares their independence clearly states that moral wrongs were committed against “**US**.” But how could moral wrongs be inflicted on “**US**” if they were not the same moral person that existed before the Declaration of Independence as existed after the Declaration of Independence? If it was an altogether different moral person that existed before the Declaration of Independence than existed after the Declaration of Independence, it should have rightly been stated, “He kept among **THEM** [rather than “among US”], in times of peace, standing armies without the consent of **THEIR** legislature [rather than “without the consent of OUR legislature].”

Again, we read in the Declaration of Independence of more moral wrongs committed by the king in these words,

For taking away **OUR** Charters, abolishing **OUR** most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of **OUR** Governments.

Here note that the moral injustice committed by the king was in taking away “**OUR**” charters, laws and forms of governments. These moral injuries occurred years before the Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776). And interestingly, though now politically/legally called the United States of America, they declare the Colonial Charters to have been “**OUR**” charters not “**THEIR**” charters. How could moral wrongs be inflicted against “**OUR**” charters, laws, and forms of government if they were not the same moral person that existed before the Declaration of Independence as existed after the Declaration of Independence? In the concluding paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, the members of the Continental Congress (as official representatives of the United States of America) declare their independence from Britain beginning with these words,

**WE**, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled . . .

Without any doubt, the same Congress that declared “**WE**” dissolve our union with the British Crown and with the State of Great Britain upon moral grounds (as a moral person) is the same moral person that was morally injured before the signing and publishing of the Declaration of Independence.

c. Thus, I submit, it is inescapable from the very words used in the Declaration of Independence that **the same moral person before God** continued after the Declaration of Independence (even though a **new political identity before men** was born). And, thus, if the British Colonies are the same moral person as the United States of America, then this inescapable conclusion must follow: The same moral Covenant (namely, the *Solemn League and Covenant*) made between God and Britain, and made between God and all of Britain’s posterity (in all his Majesty’s Dominions) must for the same moral reasons oblige the moral person of the United States of America. How, I ask, in all moral rectitude can the Continental Congress accuse the King and Parliament of Britain of moral injury against them for violating charters, laws, and forms of government, when the Colonies and the States are guilty of infinitely higher moral injury against the Most High God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, for neglecting and rejecting His *Solemn League and Covenant* with them as the posterity of Britain?

D. Let me close with one example of how the Scripture uses the same argument that I have just used to demonstrate the continuity of a moral person in different stages of existence. When David seeks to demonstrate the continuity of the same moral person from conception to mature adulthood, he uses personal pronouns that make clear that he is the same moral person at conception as he is in his adulthood. In Psalm 139:1-14, David refers to God’s knowledge of him in his present adult existence (especially consider Psalm 139:1-4 and notice the use of “me”, “my”, and “mine”). And yet in Psalm 139:13-16, David refers to God’s knowledge of him in his mother’s womb (especially consider Psalm 139:15-16 and notice the use of “I”, and “my”).

1. Do we not rightly conclude that when David uses the same pronouns for his existence in his mother’s womb and for his existence as an adult that the Holy Spirit of God is saying that David in his mother’s womb and David in his adult maturity is the same moral person? Of course we do. And for that reason abortion is murder! In spite of all the changes that that person that is in the womb at the point of conception will undergo in becoming an adult, that embryo is the same moral person as the adult which it will become.

2. So likewise and for the same reasons, we rightly conclude that the British Colonies and the United States of America were the same moral person before the Declaration of Independence and after the Declaration of Independence. All their ACTIONS in Congress and the very WORDS they used demonstrate they believed this to be the case. Thus, dear ones, if it is murder to abort a child in the womb (regardless of the stage of development) because that child is the same moral person before birth as after birth, then it is the treasonous sin of covenant-breaking against God for the United States not to acknowledge and to embrace the *Solemn League and Covenant* because the United States of America (after the Declaration of Independence) is the same moral person before God as the British Colonies (before the Declaration of Independence).

3. Dear ones, if all we had to do to remove ourselves from lawful covenants was to change our legal identity by changing our name or our citizenship, no lawful covenant (whether made with God or man) would be sacred. A man who did not want to be married to his wife any longer could simply change his name and legal identity and then by a stroke of the pen, the moral person that was previously bound by covenant to his wife would die and a new moral person would come to life who could engage in a new covenant with a new wife without any sin or guilt. All business contracts could be dissolved by merely changing the legal identity of the company. Baptism vows made to God could be rendered null and void by simply changing one’s legal identity. Dear ones, such a view would render all lawful covenants and contracts

(whether with God or man) a joke. Dear ones, may we not sinfully and treasonously look for ways to remove ourselves or our nation from lawful covenants made with the Most High God who has graciously condescended to enter into covenant with undeserving sinners like you and me, but rather may we seek (by God's grace) the strength and resolve to faithfully honor and keep our covenants with God (whether our baptismal covenants, our marital covenants, our business contracts, or the *Solemn League and Covenant*). Dear ones, none of us can perfectly and sinlessly keep the covenants we have made with God and man. For that reason, we must cast ourselves in faith upon Christ the perfect Covenant-Keeper to be our righteousness before God, to grant us sorrow when we fail, to grant us perseverance to rise again in seeking to take hold of our lawful covenants rather than to look for excuses to cast them from us. Once we begin to cast away lawful covenants, we must likewise cast away our God and all the good we have and hope to receive from Him. For all that we have from God comes only to us by means of God's Covenant of Grace in Christ, so that we who were the enemies of God have become the children of God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

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