

An Historical Defense Of Covenanting And The Solemn League And Covenant # 4

Deuteronomy 29:25; Deuteronomy 30:1-3
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We continue this Lord's Day in our study of the Solemn League and Covenant, having seen in the last lecture that the Solemn League and Covenant was not merely a National Covenant made with man, but was a perpetual National Covenant wherein the three kingdoms of England, Ireland and Scotland together as one party covenanted with the everlasting God as the other party on behalf of themselves AND on behalf of all their posterity to officially and nationally take this God of righteousness and grace as their own God through faith in Jesus Christ. We now turn our attention this Lord's Day to the posterity included in this National Covenant. In previous sermons, we have already concluded from a biblical study of the descending obligation of National Covenants that all of the posterity of the original covenanters are no less bound to keep a faithful National Covenant than are the original covenanters who solemnly swore through their official civil and ecclesiastical representatives to be His people as a nation. For the Lord sees the children in a National Covenant bound up collectively with the parents as one moral person throughout their succeeding generations in perpetuity (whether with the Jewish nation as we see in Deuteronomy 29:14-15, or whether with Gentile nations as we see with the brotherly National Covenant Tyre made and then broke with Israel in Amos 1:9-10 and 1 Kings 5:12).

Let us turn to Deuteronomy 29 as we consider our Scriptural text. In Deuteronomy 29:10-15, Moses teaches that this National Covenant between God and Israel is not a covenant made only with those adult covenanters who were living at that time, but is a National Covenant made with even the little babies of Israel who certainly could not understand the terms of this Covenant and yet were included in that Covenant (and so similarly God takes our infant children into covenant with Himself and we

apply the sign of that covenant, namely baptism, to our children). Moses then declares that if succeeding generations of Israel should cast off their Covenant God made with them and they made with Him, they shall be severely judged even to the point of being driven from their land and taken captive by heathen nations (Deuteronomy 29:28). The reason for this divine judgment is clearly stated: “Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 29:25). God’s severe judgment may be spared for even hundreds of years, but obstinate covenant-breaking will issue forth in covenant-judgment. For the passing of time, the relocation to another part of God’s world, or even the denial or forgetfulness on the part of a covenanted people cannot alter a covenant between God and man. For God condescends to become a Father to a covenanted nation. Never forget that Israel as a nation was not only bound to keep God’s commandments and to exercise the liberties granted to them by God because He was their sovereign Creator, but also because He was their adopted Father by covenant, and they were His adopted children by covenant. In a National Covenant, God becomes a Father by way of a National Covenant to a nation (and to all its posterity).

Then continuing into Deuteronomy 30, we observe that even though this covenanted nation of Israel should be scattered “among all the nations” (Deuteronomy 30:1), the Lord is still called Israel’s God (“the LORD thy God” Deuteronomy 30:1,2,3). The Lord does not remain Israel’s God because of Israel’s faithfulness to God his Father, but because God is bound to Israel and Israel is bound to Him by way of a gracious and merciful National Covenant wherein God will in spite of Israel’s hatred of Christ soon display for all of the world to see His infinite mercy in not only taking the chief of sinners and making them a trophy of His redeeming grace, but will also take the chief of Christ-hating nations and bring that covenanted nation of Israel to be an ensign of underserved love and mercy for all of the world to see. When Israel repents of their covenant-breaking and renews their covenant to obey God’s

commandments, then the Lord will once again show His abundant mercy upon His covenanted people and bring them into their ancient land where their borders will be preserved.

First, let us lay out this moral principle from our text: A National Covenant is not extrinsic (or unrelated) to a nation and its posterity, but is rather intrinsic (and intimately related) to the very nature of a nation and its posterity and to its fundamental laws and liberties. Thus, when a document refers to the fundamental laws and liberties of a covenanted nation, it is impossible that a lawful National Covenant with God could be excluded from that which is fundamental to that nation (and to all its posterity). For a National Covenant with God identifies who the people of that nation (and all its posterity) are in their civil, ecclesiastical and individual capacities—they are the people of God, the Lord is their God and they are His people (“the LORD thy God” Deuteronomy 30:1,2,3). The question, therefore, is not whether a covenanted nation is owned by God as His people, the only question is whether that covenanted nation (and all its posterity) are covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers. This is not only true of Israel, but is true of Gentile nations as well (as we see of Egypt in Isaiah 19:18,21,24-25).

Second, let us lay out this moral principle from our text: Even when relocated by force (under God’s judgment) to another part of the world and even when they become a part of a different kingdom (whether Assyria, Babylon or Persia), a covenanted nation (and its posterity) do not cease to be identified by way of their National Covenant made with God. The Lord is still their God, and they are still His people by way of covenant even when they are thousands of miles away from the mother country and mother land, and even unto a thousand generations (“and cast them into another land” Deuteronomy 29:28; “among all the nations” Deuteronomy 30:1). And if people are bound by a National Covenant when forced from the mother country or mother land (as was Israel), they are no less bound when removed from the mother country or mother land

by their own choice (as were the greater part of the inhabitants of the English colonies). Just as Jonah could not flee far enough to where his covenant-keeping God did not see and did not remember His covenant with Jonah, so none of us who are bound by covenant with God (through the Covenant of Grace, through our baptismal covenant, or through the Solemn League and Covenant) can flee or relocate ourselves far enough to where our covenant-keeping God does not see and does not remember His covenant with us.

Let us now seek to answer some important historical questions that relate to the posterity of the kingdoms of England, Ireland and Scotland, and to the fundamental laws of England, Ireland and Scotland.

I. Who Are The Posterity Bound By The Solemn League And Covenant?

A. We find in the Solemn League and Covenant the following references to “posterity” which indicates that this National Covenant binds far more than simply the generation that was alive when it was originally sworn:

[H]aving before our eyes the glory of God, and the advancement of the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the honor and happiness of the King’s Majesty **and his posterity** (Preface);

[T]hat we, **and our posterity after us**, may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us (Article 1);

[W]e shall each one of us, according to our place and interest, endeavor that they may remain conjoined in a firm peace and union **to all posterity** (Article 5).

B. Note who the “all posterity” (as mentioned in the Solemn League and Covenant) includes in a letter written by the Westminster Assembly and sent to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1644:

Those Winds which for a while do trouble the Air, do withal purge and refine it: And our trust is that through the most wise Providence and blessing of God, the Truth by our so long continued agitations, will be better cleared among us, and so our service will prove more acceptable to all the Churches of Christ, but more especially to you, while we have an intente eye to our peculiar Protestation, and to that public Sacred Covenant [i.e. the Solemn League and Covenant—GLP] entered into by both the Kingdoms [Ireland is not formally omitted here, but is omitted only because this English Assembly is addressing the Scottish General Assembly—GLP], for Uniformity **IN ALL HIS MAJESTY’S DOMINIONS** (*The Acts Of The General Assemblies Of The Church Of Scotland: From the Year 1638 to the Year 1649 Inclusive*, 4 June 1644, Session 7, “The Letter from the Synod of Divines in the Kirk of England, to the General Assembly”, pp. 231,232. Emphases added).

Unless the dominions referred to here are limited by name to specific dominions, the phrase “in all his Majesty’s dominions” must include all dominions that had and should become a part of the British Empire under the rule of the British monarch. Not only did the Westminster Assembly understand the “all posterity” bound by the Solemn League and Covenant to be “**ALL HIS MAJESTY’S DOMINIONS**”, but the faithful General Assembly of the Church of Scotland also officially declared the same to be true in their letter to King Charles I (written in 1648):

As we do not oppose the restitution of your Majesty to the exercise of your Royal Power; So we must needs desire that that which is GOD’S be given unto Him in the first place, and that Religion may be secured before the settling of any human interest; Being confident that this way is not only most for the Honor of GOD, but also for your Majesty’s Honor and Safety. And therefore as it was one of our Desires to the High and Honorable Court of Parliament that they would solicit your Majesty for securing of Religion, and establishing the Solemn League and Covenant **IN ALL YOUR DOMINIONS** [the Solemn League and Covenant having been sworn and made law by the Parliaments of England and Scotland, it was required that Charles I swear to establish it and to enforce it in all his dominions before he would be allowed to exercise his royal authority—GLP] (*The Acts Of The General Assemblies Of The Church Of Scotland: From the Year 1638 to the Year 1649 Inclusive*, August 12, 1648, Session 40, “The Humble Supplication of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland unto the Kings Most Excellent Majesty”, p. 439. Emphases added).

Furthermore, observe that not only did the Westminster Assembly and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland interpret the “all posterity” bound by the Solemn League and Covenant to be those who lived within the bounds of “all his Majesty’s dominions”, but it was likewise interpreted to be the case by the Parliament of Scotland (April 29, 1648) in a letter to King Charles I. The legal phrase, “in all his Majesty’s dominions”, that is used in this letter cannot be limited to the kingdoms of England, Ireland and Scotland unless those kingdoms were the only ones called “the dominions of his Majesty” in the legal language of that period (which we will see in a future sermon was far from being the case).

[B]efore any agreement or condition be made with his Majesty [King Charles I—GLP] (having found his late concessions and offers concerning religion not satisfactory), that he give assurance by his solemn oath, under his hand and seal, that he shall, **for himself and his successors**, give his royal assent, and agree to such act or acts of parliament, or bills, as shall be presented to him, by his parliaments of both or either kingdoms *respective*, **for enjoining the league and covenant**, and fully establishing presbyterial government, directory of worship, confession of faith, **in all his Majesty’s dominions**; and that his Majesty shall never make any opposition to any of these, nor endeavor any change thereof (John Brown, *An Apologetical Relation Of The Particular Sufferings Of Faithful Ministers*, p. 196. Emphases added).

Moreover, King Charles II swore as the King of Great Britain (June 23, 1650), and bound himself and his successors to the throne to enact the Solemn League and Covenant not only in Scotland, but also “in the rest of my dominions.” Again since there is no stated limitation as to which dominions are in view, this legal language cannot be limited to two or three dominions, but must include all the rest of his Majesty’s dominions throughout the world besides Scotland.

I, Charles, King of Great Britain, France [a mere nominal title that carried no legal right—GLP] and Ireland, do assure and declare by my solemn oath, in the presence of the almighty God, the searcher of hearts, my allowance and approbation of the national covenant and of the solemn league and covenant above written; and faithfully oblige myself to prosecute the ends thereof, in my station and calling;

and that I, for myself and successors, shall consent and agree to all acts of parliament enjoining the national covenant and solemn league and covenant; and fully establishing presbyterial government, the directory of worship, confession of faith, and catechisms in the kingdom of Scotland, as they are approved by the General Assembly of this kirk and parliament of this kingdom; **and that I shall give my royal assent to the acts of parliament enjoining the same in the rest of my dominions;** and that I shall observe these in my own practice and family, and shall never make opposition to any of these, or endeavor any change thereof (John Brown, *An Apologetical Relation Of The Particular Sufferings Of Faithful Ministers*, p. 45. Emphases added).

Let us now compare the language (especially that which addresses “all his Majesty’s dominions”) that is found in another legal document that is completely unrelated to the Solemn League and Covenant, namely, the Oath of Allegiance to King James I. If the language of this oath includes all dominions of the King outside of England (which I can hardly doubt that any would deny), then likewise the same legal language of “all his Majesty’s dominions” in reference to the Solemn League and Covenant must likewise refer to “all” dominions without exception and not mere selective ones.

I, A.B., do truly and sincerely acknowledge, profess, testify and declare in my conscience, before God and the world, that our sovereign lord, King James, is lawful and rightful king of this realm [England—GLP], **and of all other his Majesty’s dominions, and countries...** (John Brown, *An Apologetical Relation Of The Particular Sufferings Of Faithful Ministers*, p. 68. Emphases added).

Thus, I conclude from this brief survey that the intended posterity that are bound by the Solemn League and Covenant include those within “all his Majesty’s dominions.” We will in the next sermon clearly demonstrate that the colonies in America and Canada were certainly called in various legal documents “his Majesty’s dominions”, thus bringing not only the kingdoms of England, Ireland and Scotland into covenant with the Lord, but also bringing the “dominions” and colonies of North America (and elsewhere) into covenant with God by way of the Solemn League and Covenant.

II. Was the Solemn League And Covenant Included Among The Fundamental Laws And Liberties Of Britain To Which All Subjects Of The King Were Bound?

A. What are fundamental laws of a kingdom as understood in English jurisprudence? William Blackstone in his *Commentaries On The Laws Of England* (1765-1769) defined the fundamental laws of England as “the absolute rights of every Englishman” (*Book the First - Chapter the First: Of the Absolute Rights of Individuals*). Such legitimate fundamental laws defended an Englishman’s God-given rights in these major areas: in the practice of the one true religion, in personal property and life, in impartial justice, and in lawful government. Whereas “fundamental laws” pertain to all subjects of the British crown (whether they reside in England or in any other of his Majesty’s dominions), “municipal laws” were civil laws that pertained to only those living in the kingdom of England (or those jurisdictions that were specifically represented in the English Parliament). Clearly the municipal laws of England did not govern “all his Majesty’s dominions” throughout the world, but the fundamental laws of the British constitution did govern “all his Majesty’s dominions.”

B. Was the Solemn League and Covenant among the fundamental laws of England? The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland condemn the sectarians in England for having subverted “the fundamental government” of England by having broken the Solemn League and Covenant.

That prevailing party of Sectaries in England, **who have broken the Covenant, and despised the Oath of God**, corrupted the truth, **subverted the fundamental Government**, and taken away the King’s life [Charles I was executed by the Cromwellian Parliament in 1649—GLP] (*The Acts Of The General Assemblies Of The Church Of Scotland: From the Year 1638 to the Year 1649 Inclusive*, July 27, 1649, Session 27, “A Seasonable and Necessary Warning and Declaration, concerning Present and Imminent dangers, and concerning duties relating thereto; from the General Assembly of this Kirk, unto all the Members thereof”, p. 450.

Emphases added).

C. Without controversy, that law, covenant, or constitution that a magistrate is required to swear and uphold by oath before he can assume the exercise of civil power must be considered fundamental to the laws and liberties of that nation. The Solemn League and Covenant (which extended to all his Majesty's dominions as we have already noted) was required to be sworn by both Charles I and Charles II before they could exercise their royal power. Charles I did not swear it before he was executed; however, Charles II did swear it as has been noted above (Parliaments of the three kingdoms having sworn it previously).

D. Since the Solemn League and Covenant brought the kingdoms of England, Ireland and Scotland (and all their posterity in all his Majesty's dominions) into covenant with the living God, those kingdoms (and all their posterity particularly in all his Majesty's dominions) could not cease to be covenanted to God. The only question was whether they would be covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers. Such a covenant relationship between God and kingdoms (and all their posterity in all his Majesty's dominions) is absolutely intrinsic to whom such a covenanted people are, and how they are to conduct themselves. These kingdoms might unlawfully pretend to rescind the Solemn League and Covenant (as did the treacherous Charles II) in the courts of Britain, but the everlasting God confirms the Solemn League and Covenant upon Britain (and all its posterity particularly in all his Majesty's dominions) in the court of heaven.

Consider this analogy in closing. A couple who are citizens of Britain legally covenant to become the adoptive parents of a child. They are legally his parents, and he is legally their child. When the adopted child becomes an adult, he decides to relocate to the U.S. Does the legal covenant of adoption end once he travels across the ocean? Of course not. Does he have to be adopted afresh and anew in the U.S. if he subsequently

becomes a citizen of the U.S.? Certainly not. Even nations recognize such legal covenants between parents and children. How much more, dear ones, does the covenant of adoption God makes with a nation and all its posterity in all his Majesty's dominions cease not to bind just because the posterity travels across the ocean or becomes a citizen of a new nation. If covenants between men (like a legal adoption) so bind, how much more does a covenant between God and men bind (wherein God becomes a Father to a whole nation by way of a National Covenant).

Dear ones, we are a covenant-breaking nation, and this land is sadly filled with covenant-breaking churches that could care less about a covenant made some 365 years ago. There is no higher privilege for man than to be in covenant with the Lord of heaven and earth. Let us serve Him with thankful hearts and reverential fear. Let us not treat the Lord of the Covenant with contempt by thinking that the mere passage of time or relocation to another continent removes us from the perpetual covenant of our forefathers. This is to treat the most high God as if He were a mere man who cannot reach us when we relocate or who forgets solemn covenants made unto Him with the passage of time. None of us perfectly keeps covenant with the Lord and that is why we must daily fall upon the mercy and grace of our Covenant-keeper, the Lord Jesus Christ. His righteousness alone is our salvation. But we evidence our love for Him and our thankfulness to Him by not merely taking the name of "Covenanter," but by living in faith and in love to Christ as "Covenanters."

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"Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto" (Galatians 3:15).