

Who Are the Parties in a National Covenant?

2 Kings 11:17; Isaiah 19:18-25

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As we continue our defense of national covenanting from the Scripture, more questions need to be answered. Who are the parties in a national covenant: God and the nation, or the rulers and the people within the nation? If the parties in a national covenant are the rulers and the people within the nation as opposed to God and the nation, is such a national covenant less binding upon posterity than one between God and the nation? A similar question but slightly nuanced from the previous questions is this one: Is a covenant that a nation initiates with God essentially different in its nature or perpetual obligation to posterity than a covenant that God directly initiates with a nation? Does God own a covenant as His covenant only when He directly initiates it or does God own a covenant as His covenant even when He does not directly initiate it?

Why is a consideration of such questions important? It is important because various objections to national covenanting (and particularly objections to the perpetual obligation of the Solemn League and Covenant) arise which must be answered from a study of God's Holy Word. How can we rest in confidence that our convictions on national covenanting and the Solemn League and Covenant are biblical if we cannot respond to the various objections that arise? And dear ones, quite honestly, it is making man lord over the conscience if we go around saying that people are bound by a covenant but have no biblical grounds for making such an assertion. Such an assertion without biblical warrant is idolatry—it is taking God's divine authority away from Him who alone is Lord of the conscience. So we must seek (by God's grace) not to assert anything concerning national covenanting that we cannot defend from the Scripture. It may be a grievous sin to be a covenant-breaker (which violates the Third Commandment), but it is also a grievous sin to be an idolater by binding the consciences of people to a covenant that God does not hold them bound to keep (which violates the First Commandment). Let us then continue with faith in Christ to earnestly seek answers from God's Word to the objections and questions that arise about national covenanting (and particularly the Solemn League and Covenant).

I. The Parties in a National Covenant (Whether God and the Nation or Whether the Rulers and the People) Do Not Determine the Binding Obligation of a Covenant (2 Kings 11:17).

A. In 2 Kings 11, we see that Athaliah, who had tyrannically assumed the rule over Judah by murdering all of her royal grandsons (or so she thought), was removed from rule by Jehoiada, the High Priest. The Lord had preserved one of her royal grandsons from being slaughtered. His name was Joash, and he was secretly hidden from the wicked hand of Athaliah for six years. When Joash was seven years old, Jehoiada, the High Priest, secretly rallied the captains of Judah and the Levites around Joash and proceeded to execute the murderous usurper, Athaliah. Now that the wicked tyrant, Athaliah, had been removed from rule, Jehoiada moved the nation of Judah to engage themselves in a national covenant as we see in 2 Kings 11:17. Observe that one aspect of this National Covenant was made directly between God and the nation of Judah ("And Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people, that they should be the LORD'S people" 2 Kings 11:17). In other words, this aspect of the National Covenant was religious in nature (God was one party and the nation of Judah, both king and people, together comprised the other party). The substance of this religious aspect of the National Covenant was that God would be their God and they would be His people. Judah was renewing the original National Covenant made at Mt. Sinai. However, the other aspect of this National Covenant was distinctly a covenant made between the young king, Joash, and the nation of Judah ("between the king ALSO and the people" 2 Kings 11:17). The word "also" indicates that this was a separate and distinct aspect of this National Covenant. This aspect of the National Covenant was civil in

nature (the king being one party and the people of Judah being the other party). Interestingly, this is precisely the form that the Solemn League and Covenant takes as well (as we shall see in a future sermon), for it was a National Covenant concerning religious duties sworn to God with uplifted hands, but it was also a National League concerning civil duties between the king and the kingdoms of England, Ireland, and Scotland. Was the religious aspect of this National Covenant in 2 Kings 11 more binding because it was made directly with God? Did God not hear the civil aspect of this National Covenant made between the king and the people of Judah? Was the king at liberty to break his covenant with the people simply because God was not a direct party to it? Were the people of Judah free to violate their covenant with the king simply because they had not directly sworn this civil aspect of the covenant to God? Were not children who were born after this covenant was made equally bound to obey the religious aspects of this covenant and the civil aspects of this covenant, being the posterity of those who made it? Could a child of Judah not born at the time that this National Covenant was made rise up and lawfully say, "I am not bound by this covenant to be a part of God's people because I did not personally make it"? Or could the same child rise up and lawfully say, "I am not bound by this covenant to be subject to King Joash because I did not personally make it"? The point being made here is that whether it was the religious aspect of this National Covenant made with God or whether it was the civil aspect of this National Covenant made with the king (or the king with the people), both aspects of this National Covenant were equally binding not only upon the original covenanters, but also upon their posterity as well.

B. There are other places to which we may turn as well in order to demonstrate that a National Covenant not made directly with God is yet binding; and even though God is not a direct party in the covenant, He owns that covenant as His covenant.

1. In Ezekiel 17, we see that King Zedekiah of Judah had entered into a covenant and took an oath on behalf of himself and his people with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon not to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar and not to seek help from another nation. Zedekiah broke his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar by sending his ambassadors to Egypt to obtain help. Now although this covenant was not made directly to the Lord (but directly to Nebuchadnezzar), because it was a covenant which invoked God's name by way of an oath, God specifically owns it to be binding and even calls this covenant with a heathen king to be His covenant. Moreover, not only Zedekiah, but Judah as a whole would be judged for breaking this National Covenant, even though God had not directly initiated it (Ezekiel 17:19-21).

2. In past sermons we considered the covenant that Israel made with the Gibeonites (in Joshua 9). Likewise in that case, that National Covenant was not made directly with God nor directly initiated by God (but was made with a heathen nation—the Gibeonites), and yet about four hundred years later when King Saul persecuted and sought to destroy the Gibeonites, God brought His judgment upon Israel during the reign of King David (2 Samuel 21:1-2).

3. We also noted in a past sermon how binding was the obligation of a brotherly National Covenant between Israel and Tyre in Amos 1:9, which alludes to an ancient National Covenant of peace made between King Solomon and King Hiram of Tyre (1 Kings 5:12). This covenant was not made directly with God (nor initiated by God), but was made between two kings representing their nations and their national posterity. The Lord poured forth His judgment upon Tyre through Babylon hundreds of years later because Tyre turned over refugees of Israel who fled to Tyre for safety to the cruel nation of Edom. Dear ones, there simply is no evidence that a national covenant made between the magistrate and the people or between other nations is any less binding upon those parties engaged than when it is a national covenant made directly with God. Certainly, a national covenant made directly with God is a greater aggravation of the sin of covenant-breaking, but God yet owns national covenants as His covenant when His name is invoked. Dear ones, this will not help any of the posterity to escape the binding and perpetual obligation of the Solemn League and Covenant, for it was not only a national covenant sworn between kingdoms wherein God's name

was invoked by way of an oath, but was also a national covenant made directly with God—God was one of the parties to the Solemn League and Covenant (as we shall see in a future sermon).

4. Finally, such an objection would make a covenant made between men that invokes God's name less binding upon those covenanting and upon all posterity than a covenant made directly with God. That would be to say that an oath invoking God's name is less binding than a vow made directly with God. Dear ones, that would be to take the name of the Lord our God in vain. Such objections that seek to remove covenanted duties by such sophistry and unbiblical distinctions between oaths and vows are guilty of perjury and covenant-breaking. Beloved, whether that lawful covenant was made directly with God or directly with man (invoking God as a witness), whether that lawful covenant was a personal covenant, a familial covenant, a business covenant, an ecclesiastical covenant, or a national covenant, or whether that lawful covenant was made by us or by our ancestors, we must know that God will not forget our covenant-breaking. He will forgive our covenant-breaking when we seek His forgiveness, but we must renew all such lawful covenants that bind us and not drag the name of Christ through the mud by seeking to justify our covenant-breaking.

II. National Covenants between God and a Nation Are Equally Binding Whether Initiated by God or By Man (Isaiah 19:18-25).

A. The prophetic context of Isaiah 19 is that of the future millennium when Christ will reign from His throne in heaven over the nations in such visible glory that He will powerfully draw His ancient people of Israel unto Himself in a national covenant to be His people, but He will also draw Gentile nations unto Himself in national covenants to be His people as well. Interestingly, God initiated that national covenant with Israel (to be the God of Israel) at Mt. Sinai (in Exodus 20) which will be renewed by Israel in the millennium. However, Gentile nations will initiate national covenants with God to be His people as well. Now is there any essential difference in the nature or binding obligation between Israel's national covenant with God (wherein God initiated the covenant) and the Gentile's national covenants with God (wherein they initiate the covenant)? Let us see. Note in Isaiah 19:18 that Egypt shall "swear to the LORD of hosts". Nothing is indicated here that would lead us to believe that God will supernaturally speak from heaven (as He did at Sinai) in initiating this National Covenant with Egypt. And again in Isaiah 19:21 the Word of the Lord prophesies that Egypt will in that day "vow a vow unto the LORD, and shall perform it." Here again is a National Covenant made with the Lord which seems to be initiated by the nation of Egypt. Now finally notice that the National Covenant between God and Egypt (which Egypt initiated with God) is of the same essential nature and no less binding (if it is a lawful vow) than the National Covenant between God and Israel (which God originally initiated at Sinai). Observe the language that is used by God to refer to the result of Egypt becoming a covenanted nation with God in Isaiah 19:24-25 ("Blessed be Egypt my people"). Just as the National Covenant that God initiated with Israel was one in which Israel was to be God's people, so the National Covenant that Egypt initiates with God shall be one in which Egypt shall be God's people. Therefore, the matter of who initiates a national covenant (whether God or the nation) does not alter the nature, substance, or perpetual obligation of that covenant.

B. God even owns national covenants with heathen kings and nations to be His covenant which binds nations (even Gentile nations) and posterity when He is not even a direct party to the national covenant (Ezekiel 17:19-21; Joshua 9; Amos 1:9).

C. Dear ones, again we must not look for ways to avoid covenant obligations and duties to the Lord our God by trying to excuse ourselves by such foolishness. Whether God initiates a covenant with man or whether man initiates a covenant with God, the same two parties are in covenant with one another. God will certainly keep His promise to be the God of the nation that covenants with Him (whether He initiates the

covenant or whether the nation initiates it with God). The covenanted nation must therefore keep its covenant with God (whether He initiates the covenant or whether the nation initiates it with God). And I am so thankful that God will own all such national covenants that a nation initiates with God. For, otherwise, no nation (except Israel) could be God's people in covenant with Him. What an amazing set of headlines will be in those future newspapers, heard over radios, and seen over televisions and computers when not only Israel will covenant anew to be God's people through the mediatorial work of Christ, but the nations of the world will likewise follow suit in doing so by the power of God's wondrous grace. If God is then able to subdue Israel and all of the nations to Himself who now are in such rebellion against Him, is he not able to subdue you to Himself and the lusts of your flesh? Is He not able to subdue those loved ones for whom you are praying? Keep your eye of faith upon the grace and power of Christ to subdue all things to Himself to the glory of God the Father.

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