

Were the British Colonies “His Majesty’s Dominions”?

1 Kings 12:26-33; Amos 5:21

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In the last sermon dealing with National Covenanting, we considered the specific language that was used in various official documents (of both Church and State) wherein all the posterity to which the *Solemn League and Covenant* extended was identified as those “**IN ALL HIS MAJESTY’S DOMINIONS**”.

Let me add a couple more brief citations from the Journals of the House of Commons and the House of Lords of England before looking at our text for this Lord’s Day. Carefully observe how the Parliament of England ties together both religion and the liberty of British subjects **IN ALL HIS MAJESTY’S DOMINIONS** upon the grounds of the *Solemn League and Covenant*.

Letter to the Parliament of Scotland.

For the Right Honorable the Lords and Commissioners for the Shires and Boroughs assembled in the Parliament of Scotland:

My Lords,

The Parliament of England, taking Notice that the Time of the Sitting of your Parliament draws near, do esteem it a happy Opportunity to express the great Obligation they owe to the Kingdom of Scotland, which hath so effectually engaged itself in this common Cause, wherein Religion and the Liberty of the Subject **IN ALL HIS MAJESTY’S DOMINIONS** are so much concerned . . . and we hope, through the Blessing of God, will become a powerful Means for the settling His Majesty’s Dominions in Peace and Unity, according to the Grounds of the late *Solemn League and Covenant* (*House of Lords Journal*, Volume 6, May 25, 1644. Emphases added)

Next listen to the response from the Parliament of Scotland to the Parliament of England wherein the Parliament of Scotland reciprocates by summarizing their duty in the *Solemn League and Covenant* to settle truth and religion with a firm peace “**IN ALL HIS MAJESTY’S DOMINIONS**”.

Letter from the President of the Parliament of Scotland.

[A]nd, as the chiefest Design and greatest Hopes of the Enemies has been in the Division of these Kingdoms, so it is the constant Resolution of this Kingdom [Scotland—GLP] inviolably to observe their Union and Covenant [*the Solemn League and Covenant*—GLP] with their Brethren; that, against all Opposition, the Truth of Religion may be settled, with a firm Peace **in IN ALL HIS MAJESTY’S DOMINIONS**; and that the Amity [friendship—GLP] betwixt these Kingdoms may be perpetuated to all Posterity (*House of Lords Journal*, Volume 6, August 12, 1644. Emphases added).

Finally before considering our text, listen to the instructions issued by the House of Lords in England (in 1643—the same year that the *Solemn League and Covenant* was taken) wherein the House commands the Chief Naval Officer of Britain to not only protect the coasts of England and Ireland, but to protect “all other of

his Majesty's dominions" which leaves no exceptions among any of the dominions of the King. Who would reasonably argue that "all other of his Majesty's dominions" in this context excludes the dominions of His Majesty in North America or any other of his Majesty's dominions?

Instructions for the Earl of Warwick, Commander in Chief at Sea.

You are, therefore, hereby required, and fully authorized, in Case you meet with any Foreign Forces, Ships, or Vessels, as Spaniards, French, Danes, Dunkirkers, or any other whatsoever, making towards the Coasts of England, Ireland, or **any other of His Majesty's Dominions**, that you shall, according to the usual Manner, command them to strike their Flags, or Topsails, and shall cause them to be examined and searched, whether they have any Soldiers, Arms, Ammunition, or other Provisions for War in them... And you, and all Commanders, Officers, Soldiers, and Mariners, obeying your Command in this Service, for the Safety of the Parliament, this Kingdom, and the Kingdom of Ireland, and **all other His Majesty's Dominions**, shall, for your and their Indemnity, be protected by the Authority of the said Houses of Parliament (*House of Lords Journal*, Volume 5, April 5, 1643. Emphases added).

Two points ought to be clear from these citations and those from the last sermon: (1) The *Solemn League and Covenant* was viewed by the Churches and Parliaments of England and Scotland as extending to "**ALL HIS MAJESTY'S DOMINIONS**"; (2) "**ALL HIS MAJESTY'S DOMINIONS**" ought not to be limited to two or three dominions, but unless specifically qualified by the context within the document itself, the phrase, "**ALL HIS MAJESTY'S DOMINIONS**" ought to be extended to all of those colonies, plantations, or provinces within the British empire over which the Crown of Britain exercised dominion. Later in the sermon, we shall see that the Colonies in America are clearly called "**HIS MAJESTY'S DOMINIONS**". Therefore, they must be viewed as the posterity (in part) that was included in the *Solemn League and Covenant*.

In the last sermon, we noted from Deuteronomy 29 that even when the 12 tribes of Israel were judged by the Lord for their flagrant and persistent covenant-breaking and scattered throughout all nations, the National Covenant between God and Israel was not terminated. Israel may be covenant-breakers, but they cannot become covenant-terminators. They could sin against the covenant, but only God, the covenant-keeper, could entirely dissolve the covenant. In a covenant relationship, it is not the covenant-breaker that has the right to dissolve the relationship, but only the covenant-keeper. And this God has indicated He will not do with lawful National Covenants that are made with Him because a lawful National Covenant is made not only with one generation, but with all the posterity in all succeeding generations as well (as we have seen from previous sermons). A covenanted nation may aggravate its sin of covenant-breaking by its obstinate rebellion against a most gracious God, but it cannot force the everlasting God to end a covenant in which He is engaged with that nation; for the National Covenant makes that nation and all its posterity in all succeeding generations His covenanted people (so that wherever the people of that nation may relocate and under whatever new political system or new identity they may exist, they are bound by covenant).

I. Consider with me first how the 10 tribes of Israel declared their independence from the united 12 tribes that previously existed and established their own National Covenant and Constitution in violation of the National Covenant and Constitution established with God at Mt. Sinai.

A. Jeroboam became the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel (which consisted of the 10 tribes). It was discussed in a previous sermon that the 10 tribes declared their independence from the nation with which they were previously joined so that they *de facto* became a new political entity that did not

previously exist. Since the cause and results of this national division were thoroughly discussed in a previous sermon, I will focus our attention upon what occurred thereafter.

B. Our text relates how Jeroboam was perplexed as to how to maintain the loyalty of his people and the unity of his newly formed nation. He knew that if the people were allowed to maintain the same National Covenant and the same religion that had been established at Mt. Sinai, the loyalty of the people would drift back to King Rehoboam and the throne of David which would eventuate in reuniting the mother country of Israel consisting of the 12 tribes (1 Kings 12:26-27).

C. Out of the cunning of his own corrupt heart and by means of a worldly wisdom, He devised a plan to keep his political children near to their new political father and home. He would essentially change the previous National Covenant made between God and all of Israel (consisting of the 12 tribes) at Mt. Sinai by establishing his own religion. The ten tribes of Israel would still worship Jehovah in name, but they would not do so by the religion Jehovah established with Israel at Mt. Sinai in their National Covenant. So Jeroboam made images representing Jehovah, high places at which to worship rather than the temple in Jerusalem, a new priesthood from the common and ordinary people, and new feasts that were comparable to those established by God at Mt. Sinai (1 Kings 12:28-33). Jeroboam established will-worship as the religion of this new nation, a religion which “he had devised of his own heart” (1 Kings 12:33). Dear ones, the civil magistrate is bound to establish the one true religion revealed in God’s holy Word and not one “devised of his own heart”; for according to Romans 13:4, the lawful magistrate is “the minister of God to thee for good.” A church is likewise bound to worship God with that worship that has God’s approval as prescribed in His own Word, and not by the creativity of man which simply becomes another form of making our own images of gold (like Jeroboam) though we still profess with our lips to worship the one true living God of the Bible. Just as God hated the adulterated worship of Jeroboam and the 10 tribes (Amos 5:21), so the Lord still hates worship that is offered to Him which He has not authorized to bring to Him, for He is the same holy God that changes not (Malachi 3:6).

D. Now although this newly formed nation of Israel (the ten tribes) had declared (*de facto*—as that which actually occurred) their independence from the mother nation of which they had been a part (the united kingdom of Israel—the 12 tribes) and had even written a new Constitution that declared (*de facto*—as that which actually occurred) their independence from the National Covenant made at Mt. Sinai, they could not terminate (*de jure*—as that which lawfully occurred) the lawful National Covenant made with God at Mt. Sinai. And thus, the new kingdom of Israel was *de facto* a new nation, but was not *de jure* a new nation, for it had formed an unlawful Constitution that was contrary to the National Covenant previously established between them (with all of their posterity) and Jehovah at Mt. Sinai.

E. Even after declaring their independence and even after having written a new Constitution, note that God continues to demonstrate that they are still His covenanted people (1 Kings 16:1-3; 2 Kings 17:14-15). As we noted in the last sermon, even while in captivity God calls Israel his covenanted people.

F. This truth has a wonderful application to our covenant children who have been given in their baptism the sign of God’s covenant and have in that sign been given the promise of God that He will be their God. Now though that covenant relationship has been established externally (as with Israel of old), we pray that the promises made to them might be received in faith by them internally so that they might trust alone in the Lord their God by God’s sovereign grace. Dear ones, as we remember that Israel of old (consisting of the ten tribes) sought to live by entirely different rules than God had given to them, so our children may seek to do the same. God, however, encourages us to pray for our children (even our wayward children) pleading the

covenant and the promises made unto them externally that those promises might be internally realized in their lives by saving faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

II. We now turn to the Colonies and Plantations established in North America.

A. Dear ones, if God established His covenant with England, Ireland, and Scotland and all their posterity in succeeding generations and in **ALL HIS MAJESTY'S DOMINIONS** (as we have demonstrated previously), does that covenant relationship cease when the posterity relocates to America, Canada or elsewhere? Absolutely not! In fact, God moves a covenanted people to other places in the world in order that His gracious covenant might extend to include more and more people under its banner. Does the fact, that the British Colonies (previously bound by the *Solemn League and Covenant* as **HIS MAJESTY'S DOMINIONS**) declare their independence from Britain mean that they can declare their independence from God as his covenanted people? Absolutely not! Let us now consider evidence demonstrating that the colonies were **HIS MAJESTY'S DOMINIONS** and were thus entitled to all of the privileges and rights of those living in England (including being the covenanted people of God as those in England were).

B. The various Dominions, Colonies, and Plantations established by the Crown of Britain were subjects of the Crown and were established with legal documents called charters. A charter was a civil contract or covenant between the King (and his successors) and his subjects (and their posterity) wherein the King pledged his power to uphold their lawful rights as they continued to be his loyal subjects. It was thereafter referred to as a "Dominion of the Crown" or "**HIS MAJESTY'S DOMINIONS**". We will not cite the charters of all of the colonies for that would take more time than we desire to take in this series. However, the charters that are cited are representative of the charters of the other colonies. And when these charters in the name of the Crown of Britain state the Colonies to be one of his Majesty's dominions, they also state that the Colonies are entitled to "all liberties, franchises [rights due to a civil body from a ruler—GLP], and immunities [privileges due to a civil society from a ruler—GLP]." In other words, the charters grant that the same liberties, rights, and privileges that belong to those living in England also belong to those living in that distant Colony that is under the dominion of the British Crown. And I ask, what greater liberty, right, or privilege could a civil charter establish with a Colony than to be in covenant with God by way of a National Covenant? There could not possibly be a more exalted or glorious liberty, right, or privilege than to be legally the adopted children of God by way of a National Covenant. Thus, if Britain was in covenant with God by way of the *Solemn League and Covenant* (which it was), and if this was the noblest and highest honor, right, and privilege that Britain could have (which it was), then the charters establishing Colonies of Britain in North America and elsewhere which granted to these Colonies under the dominion of the Crown the liberties, rights, and privileges of those living in Britain must include the liberty, right, and privilege of being in covenant with God via the *National Solemn League and Covenant*.

1. The First Charter of Virginia—1606 (Emphases added).

Also we [the Crown of England—GLP] do, for Us, our Heirs, and Successors, DECLARE, by these Presents, that all and every the Persons being our Subjects, which shall dwell and inhabit within every or any of the said several Colonies and Plantations, and every of their children, which shall happen to be born within any of the Limits and Precincts of the said several Colonies and Plantations, shall HAVE and enjoy all Liberties, Franchises, and Immunities, **within any of our other DOMINIONS**, to all Intents and Purposes, **as if they had been abiding and born, within this our Realm of England, or any other of our said DOMINIONS.**

2. The Charter of New England—1620 (Emphases added).

Also, we do for us, our Heirs, and Successors, declare by these Presents, that all and every the Persons, being our Subjects, which shall go and inhabit within the said Colony and Plantation, and every of their Children and Posterity, which shall happen to be born within the Limits thereof, shall have and enjoy all Liberties, and Franchises, and Immunities of free Denizens and natural Subjects **within any of our other DOMINIONS**, to all Intents and Purposes, **as if they had been abiding and born within this our Kingdom of England, or any other our DOMINIONS.**

3. The Charter of Maryland—1632 (Emphases added).

We will also, and of our more abundant Grace, for Us, our Heirs and Successors, do firmly charge, constitute, ordain, and command, that the said Province be of our Allegiance; and that all and singular the Subjects and Liege-Men of Us, our Heirs and Successors, transplanted, or hereafter to be transplanted into the Province aforesaid, and the Children of them, and of others their Descendants, whether already born there, or hereafter to be born, be and shall be Natives and Liege-Men of Us, our Heirs and Successors, of our Kingdom of England and Ireland; and in all Things shall be held, treated, reputed, and esteemed as the faithful Liege-Men of Us, and our Heirs and Successors, born within our Kingdom of England; also Lands, Tenements, Revenues, Services, and other Hereditaments [property that may be inherited—GLP] whatsoever, **within our Kingdom of England, and other our DOMINIONS**, to inherit, or otherwise purchase receive, take, have, hold, buy, and possess, and the same to use and enjoy, and the same to give, sell, alien and bequeath; and likewise all Privileges, Franchises and Liberties of this our Kingdom of England, freely, quietly, and peaceably to have and possess, and the same may use and enjoy in the same manner as our Liege-Men born, or to be born **within our said Kingdom of England**, without Impediment, Molestation, Vexation, Impeachment, or Grievance of Us, or any of our Heirs or Successors; any Statute, Act, Ordinance, or Provision to the contrary thereof, notwithstanding.

C. As I indicated, these charters cited are representative of the language that is used in all of the other Colonial Charters, and so I will not continue. But I think you get the idea. Before I close today, I would like to make one observation and respond to one objection.

D. **One Observation.** These charters are clearly covenantal in that they bind both the King and all his successors and the residents of these Colonies and all of their successors to the terms of the charter.

1. This was even true when the lineage of Stewart ended and the lineage of Hanover began. The changing of the family that held the throne did not alter the binding obligation of these charters to either the Crown or to the dominions of the Crown.

2. Even when the dominions passed from the Crown to the Commonwealth (under Cromwell), the charters were not rewritten, but continued in legal obligation.

3. Now if such charters made between earthly rulers and subjects continue in obligation and force to posterity in succeeding generations (without each person or each generation having to formally renew the charter), how much more does the obligation and force of the *Solemn League and Covenant* continue to all posterity in succeeding generations; for this is a perpetual covenant with the everlasting God who follows His covenant people wherever they go throughout the whole world and who continues to be a God to His covenant people regardless of the form of government under which they may exist or regardless of their declaration of independence from their mother country.

4. The *Magna Carta* (or Great Charter) of England was established in 1215 (over 400 years before the *Solemn League and Covenant*), and it established a National Covenant between the Crown of England and the free subjects of the Crown to the effect that free subjects of the Crown were entitled to rights related to due process of law. *Magna Carta* and the limitations it placed upon the magistrate were fundamental to the rights included in the Colonial Charters. How is it that many argue that a National Covenant (namely, the *Magna Carta*) established between the Crown of England and the free subjects of the Crown could continue unabated through hundreds of years and be included in the liberties, rights, and privileges included in the Colonial Charters and yet the National Covenant established between the King of Kings and the Crown of England and all of the subjects of the Crown (which is the highest liberty, right, and privilege any human being can have, i.e. to be in covenant with Almighty God) does not continue unabated through the years and is not included at all (according to many) among the liberties, rights, and privileges granted to them as English subjects of the Crown? Dear ones, if the liberties, rights, and privileges of the *Magna Carta* are included in the Colonial Charters, then how much more are the liberties, rights, and privileges of the *Solemn League and Covenant*.

E. **One Objection.** Neither the Crown nor the subjects of the Crown in the British Colonies understood or intended the liberties, rights, and privileges granted to them to include the liberties, rights, and privileges found in the *Solemn League and Covenant*. Therefore, since they did not intend it, the *Solemn League and Covenant* was not included among the liberties, rights, and privileges included in the Colonial Charters.

1. Since this was a covenant between God and man, it is not man that has the right to tell God what are the liberties, rights, and privileges of a nation that is bound by the *Solemn League and Covenant*. Just as the ten tribes of Israel had no legal right to tell God what liberties, rights, and privileges were theirs under a new charter or constitution, so the Crown and the Colonies had no right to alter what was the highest and greatest liberty, right, and privilege that belonged to them: namely, to be the covenant people of God by way of the *Solemn League and Covenant*.

2. As stated earlier, if a human ruler can engage in a charter with a dominion of his that continues to succeeding generations, the sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, everlasting God can engage in a National Covenant that extends to all posterity wherever they may be, and neither the Crown nor the subjects can alter that covenant so that it does not apply to them any longer.

3. It is not the intention of man that determines man's duty, but rather the Law of God. The question is not what did the Crown and the dominions of the Crown intend, but what were they obligated by covenant and law to do—not what did they actually do *de facto*, but what were they obligated to do legally *de jure*. They were bound and obligated to own and specifically include in these Colonial Charters (or amend them if necessary) to make it clear that the highest and greatest liberty, right, and privilege enjoyed by both Crown and subjects of the Crown was to be in covenant with God by means of the *Solemn League and Covenant*. The fact that they did not do so was their sin of covenant-breaking, and guilt fell upon all who did not own this to be true. This was true when the Colonial Charters were established, was likewise true when the Declaration of Independence was signed, was likewise true when the Articles of Confederations was signed, and was likewise true when the Constitution of the United States was signed.

4. Dear ones, when we plead with the people of this covenanted nation to turn to Christ and to His covenant mercy, we can and ought to remind them that this is a covenanted nation. Just as we should call our covenanted children to repent of sin and turn to Christ in light of the external covenant established with them, so it is true of us as a nation. It may not be our intention as a nation to be God's covenanted people, but it is God's intention to be in covenant with us by way of the *Solemn League and Covenant*. In other words, we should plead with the people of our nation to turn to Christ because of His goodness to them by way of God's Covenant (Romans 2:4). Our hope and confidence is not in ourselves, but in

our covenant-keeping God who will not only restore His ancient people Israel to Himself, but also will turn the nations to Himself (and those bound to Him by previous National Covenants).

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