

National Church Establishments.

(The Gospel and the Nations 1-Old Testament Part 1)

When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. (Deut. 32:8)

Question.—*Wherein does the national character of the Gospel appear in Scripture?*

Answer.—There are numerous verses from the beginning of the Bible which indicate that God has dealt with the nations with a view of their becoming churches, by which the national character of the Gospel clearly appears:

First, In the very creation of man, prior to the fall, God gives man a command to subdue (כִּבְּשׁוּ, הַאֲרֶץ) and have dominion (רָדוּ, עָלֶיהָ) over the earth, Gen. 1:28. It is a command to conquer and reign over the earth, which the man does by working it (עָבַד, הָאֲרֶץ), as service to God, and by guarding it (שָׁמַר, הָאֲרֶץ), Gen. 2:15. All within a context suggesting the emergence of nations, the appointed borders set by the Lord, Gen. 2:8.

Second, After the flood, God gives Noah a series of commands which pertain to reestablishing civil societies, or nations, upon the earth, Gen. 9:1-7. These commands, upon which nations and their institutions are to find standing in the world, are built upon Noah's sacrifices, Gen. 8:20-22. From Noah and his sons, seventy nations (*i.e.*, national sons) arose to populate the world, Gen. 10:1, 31, 32.

Third, These rising nations did not continue to build upon the foundation of God, but fell into an apostasy that scattered these national sons of God throughout the earth, Gen. 11:1-9. This resulted in God choosing Israel as his lot, or inheritance (LXX; κληρονομία), Deut. 32:9-12.

Fourth, With the apostasy of the nations, God is pleased, first, to choose Abraham to make another nation, Gen. 12:1-3. In several places, the national intentions are made clear to Abraham, Gen. 17:5, 6; 22:17, 18. Once more, like Noah, we see that these national intentions are predicated upon the faith of the true religion, Gen. 15:5, 6. The fact that these national promises can only be realized in a church-state is confirmed by the apostle Paul, Rom. 4:13. Only the righteousness of faith can justify the inheritance of the earth in the nations and their kings, Matt. 5:5.

Fifth, In time, God gave remarkable fulfillments to the promise of making Abraham a great nation, 1 Kings 3:8. In the days of Solomon, the children of Israel, victorious over their enemies and dwelling in perfect peace, are the model of a great nation, 1 Kings 4:20. The greatness of this nation depended upon its faithfulness for continuance, Ex. 23:22. It was all connected with the national temple, altar and worship, which were erected and constituted by Solomon in

terms of God's appointment, 2 Sam. 7:13, 14. In this, the king recognized the stability of the people as a great nation, 1 Chron. 17:11-14; 2 Chron. 1:9, 10.

Sixth, Though Israel was a great nation, its connection with Christ remained revealed only in type and ministered by the letter, Col. 2:16, 17; Rom. 7:6. This made the connection between Christ and the nation weak, Gal. 4:9, 10. They were connected to Christ more in appearance than in reality and, hence, with the weakness and passing away of their church-state, the outward glory in like manner declined and passed away, Rom. 9:27-29. This needed to be to bring the gospel into focus for the nations of the earth, Rom. 11:11; though it shall not remain forever, Rom. 11:12. The glory of the nation, being built upon the foundation which God laid in Sion, Isa. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:6; Rom. 9:33; was a foretaste, and pledge, as well as a pattern of what Israel is yet to be in connection with Christ truly revealed, and ministered by the Spirit, Jer. 23:6.

Seventh, God, who made his ways known to Moses, Ps. 103:7; did so constitute Israel as an instructive example to other nations, Deut. 4:5-8; 1 Kings 8:43, 60. This, too, was a pledge and pattern of what other nations shall become as fellow-heirs and partakers of God's promise in Christ by the gospel, Isa. 2:2-5; Mic. 4:1-7. Their kings shall come at length to walk in the footsteps of Abraham together with their nations with them coming to make Israel's profession of faith in the Lord as the Lord their Righteousness, Isa. 19:23-25.

Thus, although since the nations began God's dealings with men have been supremely national, Ezek. 25:1-7; 29:1-3; 30:3-5; at the same time the grand end in view throughout has been that of their being constituted churches, Ps. 22:27; Isa. 49:23; and thus, and in no other way, can they become great nations, Prov. 14:34.