

National Church Establishments.

(The National Church Way as God's Way 2—The New Testament Church)

Then shall the earth yield her increase; *and* God, *even* our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him. (Ps. 67:6, 7)

Question.—*Is a dependent National Church way or an independent Congregational Church way most in accord with Scripture prophecy?*

Answer.—Though it may be little disputed that the church of the Jews was established and national, Isa. 43:1; yet, it remains to be discussed whether or not this national church way is under the Gospel still a matter of divine approbation:

First, When the prophets foretell the enlargement of the church in the Gospel era, they still predicate it of nations and kingdoms, with kings to nurse them, Isa. 49:22, 23; even as the national church of Israel had, Num. 11:12; 2 Chron. 15:8. They predicate it of nations and kingdoms, noting not only the multitude, but the united orderly governed societies, Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1, 2. It is not merely congregations in nations, much less one here or there, Ps. 72:8, 17-19. By the Lord's house is meant the church, Heb. 12:22; its notable visibility and dignity are expressed, Ps. 48:2, unto which the kings are assembled, Ps. 48:4-6. The flowing of all nations unto it can only mean that all covenanting professors of the true religion, together with their children, shall present themselves to the Gospel church, Heb. 2:13; as it was in the national church of the Jews, Deut. 31:11-13.

This same prophet, Isaiah, speaking of Christ, uses this word "nation" to signify the nations of the Gentiles, Isa. 65:1; which is clearly set forth by the apostle, Rom. 10:20. So, too, Isaiah elsewhere implies, Isa. 60:5.

Again, the prophet Zechariah describes them as strong (*i.e.*, numerous, *גְּוֹיִם רַבִּים*) nations, Zech. 8:22. How this word "strong," or numerous, can stand with the notion that a few scattered congregations can take the name of nation does not appear, Isa. 60:22; Gen. 18:18. Furthermore, the word "nation" signifies a united society with dependence, government and order (all the parts in relation to the whole, 1 Cor. 12:12), as other words used to signify the church (*e.g.*, army, city, kingdom, *etc.*), Song 6:4; Matt. 5:14; Col. 1:13.

Second, When the prophets foretell Christ's calling of the Gentile nations, his calling of them is to be understood of calling them into a covenant relation to Himself, as the national church of Israel was called, Ex. 19:5, 6. If we ask what is meant by Christ's calling of the nations and their running unto Him, it appears that it is to enter into a covenant relation with Himself to make them national churches, Isa. 55:5. Now, it is this very thing that Christ signified before His ascension, Luke 24:26, 46, 47.

Third, By God's taking the Gentile nations into a covenant relation with Himself in Christ, those nations do by that means take the name of God's people, both parents and children in a special sense, as the national church of Israel did,

Deut. 7:6. This appears to be the case in the statements of many of the prophets, Zech. 2:11. As in the time of Zechariah there was one nation joined to the Lord by way of national covenant, so in the days of the Messiah many nations should be joined to Him, Isa. 11:9, 10. It is plain that Israel became "my people" when in the way of the national church of the Jews they entered into covenant with God, Ezek. 16:8. Furthermore, this privilege belonged to both parents and infants, for God lays claim to the children born of His wife, Ezek. 16:20, 21.

Again, the prophet Hosea foretells the Lord taking Gentile nations into covenant with Him, and by consequence making them national churches, Hos. 2:23. Here is the substance of the covenant which constituted the nation of the Jews, parents and children together to be the people and church of God, Deut. 29:13. Even so, the apostle expounds this place in Hosea of the Gentiles being taken into covenant with God as Israel was to become his churches and people in a special sense, Rom. 9:24, 25.

Fourth, For a nation to be called God's people, is all one and the same as for that nation to take the name of God's church, Isa. 19:24, 25. Herein we see these nations joined to the Lord *as* Israel, Jer. 50:5; God's inheritance *as* Israel, Deut. 32:9; blessed of the Lord *as* Israel, Isa. 65:8; take the name of God's people in a special sense *as* Israel, Ezek. 16:8. Yet, this name was proper to the national church of the Jews as appears when God unchurches them, Hos. 1:9; and when He churches the Gentiles in their room and stead, He calls them by this name, Hos. 2:23.

Therefore, as the national church of the Jews had kings to nurse it, so Isaiah foretells the conversion of kings to nurse the national churches of the Gospel, Isa. 60:3. So, to this purpose the apostle was sent by Christ's special appointment not only to the people but the kings of the Gentiles, Acts 9:15. By which we ought to understand that he meant to convert them so that national churches of the Gentiles might have princes and kings to be political heads to them *even as* the national church of the Jews had, Rev. 21:24.