

## Does a Declaration of Independence End Covenanted Obligations?

Amos 8:1-2; Jeremiah 23:13

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Some of those who object to the United States being bound by the Solemn League and Covenant have argued that the case might possibly be made that the Thirteen Colonies while officially united to Great Britain were bound by the Solemn League and Covenant, but after declaring independence from Great Britain and after formally settling its distinct and separate status as an independent nation from Great Britain by way of the Declaration of Independence (1776) and at the Treaty of Paris (1783), the United States as a distinct political entity from Great Britain was no longer bound to the Solemn League and Covenant. However, if it can be shown from Scripture that divisions into distinct and separate nations does not loose the obligation of binding National Covenants made unto God when there was only one nation and one king, then we shall have a biblical principle that can be used in regard to the United States. The biblical and historical example of the covenanted nation of Israel furnishes us with a particular case in point. Let us then consider the objection in light of the covenanted nation of Israel.

### **I. Objection: No formal covenanted obligations continue upon a nation once it declares its independence from that political entity to which it was formerly united and with which it stood covenanted to God.**

A. Let us turn to our text this Lord's Day in Amos 8:1-2. The prophet, Amos, had been a common herdsman and fruit picker from the town of Tekoa in the southern kingdom of Judah just south of Jerusalem before being called by God to be a prophet. He apparently had no formal training and did not attend a school of the prophets. His father was of no position or rank. And yet the Lord reached down, called and gifted Amos to be His prophet (Amos 7:14-15).

1. Dear ones, do not despise the day of small and insignificant beginnings in your lives; for the Lord delights to take those like Amos or those like David who have very common and ordinary jobs and to use them for important tasks in His kingdom. However, the Lord calls you presently to be faithful in the seemingly small things He has given you to do before He will entrust you with greater things to do.

2. Sometimes we undermine the present tasks God has given us and miss the opportunity for building God's kingdom because our eye is always upon the spotlight and making a name for ourselves. Do you see the importance in God's kingdom of being a good and faithful father, husband, son or being a good and faithful mother, wife, or daughter? Do you see the value of learning to be submissive to God's will and applying yourself while you are single, while you are a student, in all of your household chores, and in all of what may be called common and ordinary work? A good steward is above all else faithful with what his master gives him (whether great or small). Are you being faithful with the time, talents and treasures God has given to you or are you rather moaning and groaning about the petty work you have been given to do?

B. Amos received the call from God to prophesy to the northern Kingdom of Israel rather than to the southern Kingdom of Judah during the reign of Jeroboam II (King of Israel) in the years between 780-750 B.C. The prophecy of Amos is for the most part directed against covenant-breaking Israel and the impending judgment that is about to fall upon them by God in sending the Assyrian forces upon them for their national destruction and captivity. We will come back to the vision that God gave to Amos in chapter 8 momentarily, but let us briefly review how the division between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah occurred.

1. God had entered into a National Covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai after the Lord had graciously delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt. About 500 years later, the Lord established Israel as a

Kingdom under the rule of Saul—its first king. The Lord then gave the United Kingdom unto David who was a man after God’s own heart. The Lord covenanted with David to establish his house and to give to him and to his posterity the Kingdom of Israel. The Kingdom of Israel remained united under the National Covenant they had made with God at Mt. Sinai during the reigns of David and Solomon. Upon the death of Solomon, Rehoboam, his son, proved to be young and foolish. You will recall from 2 Chronicles 10 that the people came to Shechem to make Rehoboam king, but before doing so they asked him to relieve them of some of the exceeding great burdens that Solomon had placed upon their shoulders. Rehoboam first consulted with the elderly and wise counselors of his father, who advised the king to extend a soft answer granting the request of the people. He then consulted with his young inexperienced peers, who foolishly advised the king to threaten the people with even greater burdens. Ten of the tribes united under Jeroboam I and (sinfully, I believe) established a separate and distinct kingdom—the northern Kingdom of Israel. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin followed the lineage of David and constituted the southern Kingdom of Judah. Thus, there was a declaration of independence by the ten tribes of the Kingdom of Israel from the two tribes of the Kingdom of Judah. The northern Kingdom of Israel made Jeroboam their king, and he established his own corrupt church to prevent his people from going to Jerusalem (in the southern Kingdom of Judah) to worship God as He had commanded them to do.

2. We could give much more detail about the division that occurred, however, I will rather summarize what occurred by reading the words of Abijah, the son of Rehoboam, as he prepared to battle with Jeroboam (2 Chronicles 13:4-12). Although the separation of Israel from Judah was providentially ordained by the Lord (as all events are, whether sinful or righteous) as we see in 2 Chronicles 10:15 (2 Chronicles 11:4), it would appear from the words of Abijah and the subsequent victory that God gave to Judah over Israel that the separation of Israel from Judah was not according to God’s revealed will (Hosea 8:4).

3. However wrong this separation was according to God’s revealed will, the result of this separation was *de facto* the declaration of independence of a new kingdom, namely Israel, founded upon a different constitution from that of the Kingdom of Judah. Thus, the Kingdom of Israel turned its back constitutionally upon the National Covenant with God made at Mt. Sinai (Hosea 8:1-4).

4. Now having laid out this historical background, how did God view the newly formed Kingdom of Israel in relation to the National Covenant made with Him at Mt. Sinai? Was the Kingdom of Israel still bound to the National Covenant after they declared their independence from Judah? If a part of a nation or kingdom is bound by a solemn National Covenant made with God, do they remain bound to God by National Covenant if they break away from the kingdom with which they were previously united? Let us now return to Amos 8:1-2.

C. Amos is given a vision by God to convey to the northern Kingdom of Israel. This vision pictures a basket of summer fruit. The summer fruit was the fruit that had not been picked earlier in the season, but had been allowed to fully ripen upon the tree. Because this fruit had already ripened when picked, it was ready to be eaten when placed in a basket. By this vision of a basket of summer fruit, God was saying (according to God’s own interpretation in Amos 8:2): “The end is come upon my people of Israel.” In other words, the fruit of their sin has so ripened over the time of their history as a kingdom that they are about to be consumed as a basket of summer fruit is ready to be eaten quickly. The Assyrians are at the door (as it were). God says that He will not pass by Israel with His gracious correction any longer—they are about to be removed from the Promise Land as a kingdom and into Assyrian captivity (which occurred in 722 B.C.). How does this passage (and others like it) relate to the objection before us? Remember the objection? “No formal covenanted obligations continue upon a nation once it declares its independence from that political entity to which it was formerly united and with which it stood covenanted to God.” Does this passage in Amos 8:1-2 indicate that there was yet a covenantal relationship between the northern Kingdom of Israel and God even though Israel

had separated itself from and declared its independence from the southern kingdom of Judah? Absolutely, and for the following two reasons from our text.

1. God calls the northern Kingdom of Israel “my people Israel” (Amos 8:2). The words “my people” are not used indiscriminately or without purpose. To the contrary, the words “my people” mean “my covenanted people.” For the words “my people” mean that by way of covenant, the Kingdom of Israel is God’s collective people and He is their God regardless of the backsliding and corruption into which they had fallen. This is established in so many passages of Scripture, but let me mention two passages to make the point.

a. Exodus 19:5—by way of Israel’s National Covenant with God at Mt. Sinai, God declares them as a nation to be His people (and by good and necessary inference He declares Himself to be their God). Thus, Israel (all 12 tribes) became God’s people at Mt. Sinai by way of their National Covenant. Just because 10 of the 12 tribes separated from the 2 tribes and declared their independence from the 2 tribes and formed a distinct and separate kingdom (with their own non-Davidic king and their own non-Levitical priesthood) did not release the 10 tribes from that National Covenant to which they were bound when they were one United Kingdom composed of 12 tribes.

b. Isaiah 19:24-25—by way of Egypt’s National Covenant with God in the future millennial period (as we see in Isaiah 19:18,21), God declares them as a nation to be His people (and by good and necessary inference He declares Himself to be their God). When God calls the nation of Egypt “my people” (Isaiah 19:25), He means, “Egypt, my covenant people.” For Egypt will like Israel become God’s people by way of their own National Covenant. Thus, from these two examples, we clearly see that when the Lord calls the northern Kingdom of Israel “my people”, He is yet calling them a people bound to Him by way of the National Covenant made with Him at Mt. Sinai. Their declaration of independence did not remove them from their covenant with God. For although there were mutual duties that the tribes owed to one another as a result of that National Covenant, it was to God that they had sworn that National Covenant and whether they remained united as one kingdom or not, they still were bound by covenant to God and still owed to God faith, love and obedience as their God. And so it is likewise true of the United States. While they were Thirteen Colonies within the British Empire and a part of his “majesty’s dominions” in North America, they were as such bound by the National Covenant (the Solemn League and Covenant) made with God by England (1643). The Declaration of Independence (in 1776) may have formed a new nation (*de facto*), but such a separation from Great Britain did not release the United States from its solemn Covenant with God. It was before its Declaration of Independence a covenanted Dominion and after its Declaration of Independence a covenant Nation. If the United States is not now a covenanted Nation bound by the Solemn League and Covenant, then it must be consistently argued that it was never bound as British Colonies or as Dominions of the king (which I do not believe the testimony of historical documents will permit). I do not believe, however, that it can be biblically argued that the British Colonies were at one time bound to God by the Solemn League and Covenant but due to their Declaration of Independence they are no longer bound.

2. The second reason from our text in Amos 8:2 why we can conclude that the northern Kingdom of Israel was yet a covenanted Nation (though separated from the southern Kingdom of Judah) is because of the impending judgment threatened upon them by God for their covenant-breaking (“The end is come upon my people of Israel. I will not again pass by them any more”). This impending judgment will lead Israel into captivity (Amos 7:17). If Israel was not bound to the National Covenant any longer, why would they be judged for covenant-breaking? The prophet Hosea was a contemporary of Amos, and he gives the reason for the judgment upon Israel (Hosea 8:1-4).

D. Consider a sampling of a few more texts wherein the northern Kingdom of Israel is referred to as God’s people: Amos 9:10; Jeremiah 23:13; 1 Kings 16:2.

E. What I want to leave with you as I bring this sermon to a close is the amazing covenant grace of

our covenant God, who does not forget His covenant even with covenant-breakers. For although the covenant-breaking Kingdom of Israel was severely judged by the Lord in being led into captivity by God, God in His undeserving covenant love and mercy will yet draw back unto Himself the covenant-breaking Kingdom of Israel (Deuteronomy 29:25-29; Deuteronomy 30:1-3; Zechariah 10:6-9; Romans 11:25-29). Dear ones, does not such undeserved covenant love and mercy melt our own hardness of heart? Where shall we go to find such a story of love in all of the world? The most holy and high God, who does not need us, loves us with an infinite and everlasting love. The everlasting God, who knows the worst about us, has chosen to set His love upon us and to redeem us by way of a covenant of salt (an unbreakable covenant) in Jesus Christ, who perfectly fulfilled all of the Covenant of Works which condemned us in Adam and imputed to us by faith alone Christ's perfect obedience and suffering as our own. Now all things are yours whether in heaven or in earth, for you are the heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. Let not your sin and covenant unfaithfulness keep you away from Christ, but rather let His tender mercy drive you to Him in faith and repentance and not away from Him.

F. Dear ones, take an English concordance and see how many times we are encouraged by God Himself in His Word to come to Him for needs that we have on the basis of these words: "My God" or "Our God" which is to say (as we learned from the sermon today), "My covenant-keeping God" or "Our covenant-keeping God". What is your need, dear one? Call upon your covenant-keeping God: "But MY GOD shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). Are you in need of physical deliverance from danger? Call upon your covenant-keeping God: "MY GOD hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt" (Daniel 6:22). Do you find yourself in some kind of distress? Call upon your covenant-keeping God: "In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto MY GOD: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears" (Psalm 18:6). Are you burdened for the salvation of your children? Call upon your covenant-keeping God: "I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art MY GOD from my mother's belly" (Psalm 22:10). Are you in need of healing from some physical infirmity? Call upon your covenant-keeping God: "O LORD MY GOD, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me" (Psalm 30:2). Are you discouraged and cast down in your soul? Call upon your covenant-keeping God: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, [who is] the health of my countenance, and MY GOD" (Psalm 42:11). Are you in need of understanding the will of God? Call upon your covenant-keeping God: "Teach me to do thy will; for thou art MY GOD: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness" (Psalm 143:10). Dear ones, all we need in this life and in heaven to come is bound up with Christ in the Covenant of Grace. Make the Covenant of Grace alive by appealing in faith to God as your covenant-keeping God and by appealing in faith to Him on the basis of His own Word.

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