

MESSIAH THE PRINCE,
Or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ.
By William Symington.
Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 26.

CHAPTER 8.
THE MEDIATORIAL DOMINION
OVER THE NATIONS.
(The Duties of Nations—Continued.)

Fifthly. Nations, as the moral subjects of Messiah the Prince, are under obligation to recognise his rightful authority over them, by swearing allegiance to him. It is the duty of a subject to swear allegiance to his lawful sovereign; at least he must stand prepared to do so when required. So is it with nations. Not only are the inhabitants of a nation, as occasion calls for it, to enter into sacred confederation with one another in order to secure and defend their valued rights and privileges, but the nation, as such, through the medium of its authorised functionaries and by its usual forms of legal enactment, ought publicly to avow its attachment to the Lord Jesus Christ as its King and Prince, to recognise his legal authority, and to bind itself to his service by an oath. ► It is not supposed that the formal act of swearing allegiance is to be gone into lightly, or on all occasions. But, certainly, in times of deep distress, as a means of animation and comfort; in times of backsliding and danger, for the purpose of promoting stability; as calculated to promote and maintain steps of reformation; and also as a fit mode of expressing gratitude for public blessings, a nation may warrantably and dutifully engage in such an exercise. The example of the nation of Israel, of old, might be easily adduced in circumstances such as these.¹ From time to time, that people publicly and solemnly recognised their allegiance to the Lord their Redeemer.

The transaction at Sinai partook distinctly of a federal character. The children of Israel were then put in possession of a complete body of laws, for the regulation of their national concerns. Stipulations and restipulations were mutually passed. On the one hand, the Messiah, amid a display of awful majesty, offered them a civil constitution and moral organisation. On the other, by the repeated declaration, ‘All that the Lord hath said, we will do,’ the people formally accepted the gracious offer, promised obedience to it, and solemnly avowed their allegiance to him by whom it was given. Possessing the nature, this transaction received the name, of a *covenant*. From the gracious covenant relation in which the people of Israel stood to God, it is plain that, in this whole transaction, they had to do with the Son of God as Mediator. In no

¹ The reader may consult at his leisure the following passages:—Neh. 9.1-13; Deut. 29.10-15; Josh. 24.25; 2 Kings 11.17,20; Psalm 76.11; 2 Kings 23.1-3; Isa. 44.3-5.

other character, could any of the guilty race of man receive blessings from him, or promise him obedience. ► Nor was there anything in the circumstances of that people which rendered the duty in question peculiar to them. What was adapted to promote national prosperity in their case, is calculated to do the same in all cases. It is more reasonable to regard their political organisation as a *model* to future nations, than as an *exception* from all others. The faculties, powers, passions, rights, and interests, of men are the same at all times; nor is there anything either local or restricted in those commands by which ancient Israel were enjoined to enter into covenant with God. Indeed, when we look into the predictions which refer to New Testament times, we are at no loss to perceive that the duty of national vowing to the Lord is not limited to the Jews. ► ‘In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts. The Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and shall perform it.’ [Isa. 19.18,20.] Here it is distinctly made known that, in the days of the Gospel, Gentile countries should copy the example of ancient Canaan, in the matter of vowing allegiance to the Lord. To the same effect we read:—‘Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.’ [Isa. 62.4.] A *land* is just a people in their civil capacity: and its being ‘married to the Lord’ surely denotes its being bound to him by covenant engagement, as the wife is to her husband.

The principle has been exemplified in more modern times, in France, Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, as well as in our own country. The National Covenant of Scotland, and the Solemn League entered into by Scotland, England, and Ireland, are memorable instances of national oaths of allegiance to the Messiah. These were sworn and approved by the king and his household, and by persons of all ranks in the land. This is not the place to defend the nature of these noble instruments, to shew their obligation on posterity, or to speak at large of the guilt these nations have incurred by their perfidious neglect of them. These are topics, indeed, of no mean importance in themselves, besides being worthy of very serious consideration at the present time, in connection with existing agitations and discussions. But we have to do with them now only as accredited and interesting exemplifications of the national duty of swearing allegiance to the Redeemer. ► It has been much the practice of a flippant generation to laugh at ‘the Covenant’ and ‘the Solemn League,’ as the products and signs of an illiberal and unenlightened age; but it may fairly be questioned, on the authority of the best historians, whether our country ever appeared in a more dignified attitude than during the period in question, or whether a kingdom can ever be more dutifully or appropriately employed than in solemnly and sincerely vowing to him, by whom kings reign and princes decree justice,—the Prince of the kings of the earth.

There is still another duty of nations to the Redeemer, to which, from its importance, we shall devote a separate chapter.

It is impossible, in the meantime,² to review what we have written on the Mediatorial dominion over the nations, without reflecting that this department of the Redeemer's administration and glory has not met with sufficient attention. Its importance it is impossible to deny. Yet it is lamentable to think how inadequately it has been appreciated. By some it is almost entirely overlooked and treated with neglect. By others it is denied and speculatively opposed. It is easier to account for, than to vindicate or excuse, such conduct. What friend of Messiah the Prince but must lament, deeply lament, such a state of things? Oh, that men would throw aside their prejudices, and not suffering themselves to be warped by their supposed temporal interests, would come forward and at all hazards acknowledge the Redeemer as 'Governor among the nations!'

The doctrine in question is entitled to occupy a prominent place in the contending of the witnesses; it forms a chief part of the word of Christ's patience, for which his disciples are to lift up a clear and manly testimony before an ungodly world and rebellious nations. Instead of being passed over altogether, or thrown into obscurity, or treated with a mere passive assent, it ought to stand conspicuously out in the Church's creed, to be frequently brought forward by her ministers, and clearly unfolded in all its grand associations, in all its practical bearings, and in all the fulness of its consoling power. It should be held up to the nations of the earth to reprove them for their past rebellion, and to admonish them regarding their future procedure. It should be urged upon them, as calculated to remind them of the high and sacred duties they owe to the Messiah, of their obligations to respect his glory, to take his law as their rule, to have regard to his authority in the choice of their office-bearers; and in the subjection they yield to them, to swear allegiance to his crown, and to extend countenance and support to his Church upon earth. Nor should it be omitted to remind them of the divine displeasure they incur, and the judicial visitations to which they expose themselves, by pursuing, as too many of them do, a course of unhallowed rebellion against the King of kings.

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Supplemental Item: The Schmalkaldic League, 1531.

We, by the grace of God, John, archmarshal and elector, and John Frederick, father and son, dukes of Saxony, landgraves of Thuringia, and margraves of Meissen; we, Philip, Otto, Ernst, and Francis, brothers and cousins, [&c. &c.] – declare and inform everyone:

Recent events have gone back and forth, rapidly and menacingly, in such ways that they seem to develop, signal, and portend that some intend to coerce those who, through God's grace and grant, have allowed the open, clear, pure, and unspotted Word of God to be preached and spread in their principalities, cities, lands, and regions, by means of which all sorts of abuses are reformed or abolished. The former intend to block with armed force the latter's Christian enterprise, even though every Christian ruler is obliged by his office not just to have the holy Word of God preached to his subjects, but also to employ every effort, firmness, and resource

2 The remainder of this chapter was added by the author in the second edition.

to assure that they are not coerced away from God's Word or even against it. For us, the highest duty and obligation of the ruler's office requires that if it should happen, now or in the future, that anyone should attempt to force us or our subjects to surrender the Word of God and the clear truth – which God may prevent, and which we expect from no one – and to return to the abolished and corrected abuses, we intend with all possible effort to see that such coercion is blocked and our ruin, body and soul, ruler and ruled, may be avoided. ► Therefore, we have formed a Christian brotherly agreement with and among one another. We make it for the praise of God Almighty, for the spread and growth of godly, free doctrine, and for the revival and promotion of a united, Christian body, and for the peace of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and all that is honorable, also for the prosperity, welfare, benefit, and honor of all of our principalities, cities, and lands. We do this solely for the purpose of defense and self-preservation, which is accorded to everyone both by customary and written law. This association shall be considered and accepted at this time through the power of this document in the following form and measure.

To wit, that we all intend loyally and sincerely to support one another, and that we should and will warn one another of dangers. None shall knowingly allow the enemies and foes of another to sneak through, advance, or withdraw. Our League is intended solely for defensive and repulsive purposes and not for any of us to start a war of any kind. It may happen that one of us, no matter which one, shall be attacked and invaded or threatened by feud and invasion because of the Word of God, the evangelical doctrine, and our holy faith, or on other grounds that depend on the Word of God, the evangelical doctrine, and our holy faith, or because of something alleged against one of us, so that we others, who are not attacked, can conclude that this attack is being made principally because of the Word of God, and thus could be extended to the rest of us. ► In that case, we others who are all united in this Christian League, also each on his own account, shall, as soon as we hear and accept report from the victim or another reliable source, regard the matter as though we ourselves were under attack, made feud against, or invaded, and as though the matter were our own. In that case, each ally shall, without delay and without waiting for the others, muster all of his resources to aid him who has been declared feud against or invaded, to save and free him and give him air and space. The rest of us shall, as best we can, loyally take up the matter, just as each one's Christian love and loyalty, conscience, and interest demand. We shall, one and all, render aid in the most rapid and efficient manner, as seems best and most appropriate to the case at hand. Nor, failing [*without, disregarding*] the knowledge and consent of the others, shall any undertake or commit himself to any arbitration, agreement, or truce.

This, our Christian League, is not intended to be against His Imperial Majesty, our most gracious lord, or anyone else, but only to sustain Christian truth and peace in the Holy Empire and the German Nation. It is meant, therefore, solely as a defense and protection for us, our

subjects, and our relations against unjust coercion. Otherwise, each of us is willing to seek and accept the law's judgment.

If an estate who is not a member wishes to join this, our Christian League, he shall be accepted and admitted with the knowledge and consent of all, provided that he himself has accepted the Holy Gospel.

Our Christian League, which shall begin today and remain in force for six consecutive years, will be accepted and held to by each and all of us honestly, loyally, and against any threat.

If it should happen that any member shall go to war with anyone because of God's Word or related grounds, and if the war is not settled before the six years are up, even though the stipulated term has run out and the League itself has [legally] expired, all members shall nonetheless remain steadfast and see the matter through to its end, and no member shall withdraw or take independent action.

This Christian League may be extended, should the parties to it so wish.

We, the aforementioned elector, princes, counts, and urban envoys pledge that these terms and promises shall be maintained firmly, constantly, and consistently, and we shall follow and live by them honorably, loyally, and without reservations, and do nothing that is in any way contrary to them. This we pledge by our honor and dignity, on our word and oath, for ourselves and our heirs or successors, and in accordance with this agreement.

Finally, in order to document, strengthen, and give greater security [to this act], we, the aforementioned elector, princes, counts, and cities, affix our seals. Namely, we Duke John, elector, for us and our son, Duke John Frederick of Saxony, Dukes Ernest for himself and his two brothers, Otto and Francis of [Brunswick-]Lüneburg, deliberately affix our seals to this treaty. Given on Monday after Invocavit Sunday [7th of Feb.] in the year of Our Lord 1531.

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Discussion Questions:

1. What is the fifth duty which nations, as such, owe to Messiah the Prince?
 - A. They "are under obligation to recognise his rightful authority over them, by swearing allegiance to him."
2. What do men naturally conclude the inhabitants of a nation are under obligation to do when it comes to public oaths and vows in civil concerns?

A. They have often considered it necessary to “enter into sacred confederation with one another to secure and defend their valued rights and privileges.”

3. What caution does Dr. Symington observe about the weightiness of such oaths, or proper time for them?

A. “It is not supposed that the formal act of swearing allegiance is to be gone into lightly, or on all occasions.”

4. What are some suitable times for public covenanting?

A. “Times of deep distress... times of backsliding and danger, for the purpose of promoting stability... reformation... [or] expressing gratitude for public blessings.”

5. When were the children of Israel first brought into a federal covenant with the Lord as a nation?

A. At Mount Sinai the transaction had this special character, as they were given a complete body of law for the regulating of their nation, and brought to commit themselves to the Lord and “all that the Lord hath said.”

6. Should this covenant be seen as an expression of the Covenant of Works, or a dispensation of the Covenant of Grace with the Son of God as Mediator?

A. This transaction established a gracious covenant relation, and required the mediation of the Son of God because it was a covenant by which those of the guilty race of man received God’s blessings.

7. How relevant is Israel’s covenanting with the Lord for other nations or peoples in later times?

A. Because there was nothing peculiar to the people that would make this their unique duty, it should be seen as a model for other nations also, rather than an exception from what ought usually to be done.

8. Does the Bible lead us to expect that Israel will be the only nation to covenant with the LORD?

A. No. In Scripture Prophecy we are explicit told of the Egyptians covenanting with the Lord, Isa. 19.21; and assured that Assyria also shall be in such league with Egypt and Israel.

9. What other nations in later times have professed their allegiance to King Jesus either by covenants, vows, sworn confessions of faith, or territorial leagues, etc.?

A. France, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, as well as Scotland, England, and Ireland.

10. What does Dr. Symington suggest as a quick and simple reply to those who flippantly discredit the reformation covenants of Britain as unenlightened?

A. “It may fairly be questioned, on the authority of the best historians, whether our country ever appeared in a more dignified attitude than during the period” of the covenants.

11. What observation did Dr. Symington see needful to add to the end of this chapter?

A. He observed that the doctrine of Christ’s Mediatorial dominion over the nations was a matter which deserved more attention than it was given, and was entitled to occupy a prominent place in the contending of witnesses for Christ; — It ought to have a conspicuous place in the Church’s creed.

12. What was the occasion which led several German princes to meet at Schmalkalden and enter into a Christian League with one another?

A. Events made evident that “some” intended to coerce those who had embraced the Word of God to return to the abuses which had previously been reformed or abolished.

13. Did the nature of this league, as serving to “defend and repulse,” leave it without any active and positive goals?

A. No. It was professedly made “for the praise of God Almighty, for the spread and growth of godly, free doctrine, and for the revival and promotion of a united, Christian body, and for the peace of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and all that is honorable, also for the prosperity, welfare, benefit, and honor of all of our principalities, cities, and lands.”