

Leadership And The Covenants (Part One)

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This is a sermon, parts of which I have given in the past, but somehow or another I managed to weld them together or least make them flow together so that they became part of the same subject. I hope that I will get something across to you that is important to your growth in the way of God.

Are you aware the term leadership does not appear even one time in *Strong's Exhaustive concordance of the Bible*? That means, if they have every word of the Bible there, it is simply not in the book.

Are you aware that the term leader appears only three times, and the term leaders also appears only three times? All forms of 'lead' appear a total of eighty one times, but the terms follow, followed, followeth, followers, and following, appear two hundred and fifty eight times. That is three times more than all forms of lead.

We are to follow Christ, we are to follow the ways of God, and it seems as though in God's Book, following precedes leading. In other words, leading is preceded by following because it is *while following that we are trained to lead*.

Are you aware that what we are to follow is very frequently inserted and defined in a series of covenants scattered throughout the Old Testament and yet the only two covenants most seem to be aware of are the old and the new covenants?

The responsibility for this ignorance primarily falls right into the lap of the ministry. The ministry is not totally to blame, church membership is also to blame, because they are not all that interested in covenants in God's Word. They seem to be dull, boring, deep, there is nothing that excites a person right off to attract them to an agreement between God and man.

These same people are somewhat interested, in fact deeply interested in getting salvation, but not all that interested in increasing their general knowledge of God's Word in the area of covenants. If something exciting happened in there like a murder, or maybe some kind of a sexual attraction, people would look at covenants more.

We seem to be a people who will respond to something that appears on the surface to be exciting, it all depends on where your mind is. Maybe to a lawyer a covenant is really

something to cheer about, but most of us are not turned in that direction. Do not let me kid you, those covenants are really important.

These are more specific and technical things that have been categorized as being the sole interest of the professionals covenants and therefore set aside as areas unnecessary for the average member to delve into.

Jesus said, we are to live by every Word of God and those covenants are part of the Word of God, and therefore those areas require some attention because they add to the overall impact of God's Word upon us and we are denying ourselves blessings in understanding and the proper making of right choices by avoiding them.

One of Israel's major failures since its founding of a nation has almost always been a lack of righteous leadership. How often do we read that this or that king did evil in the sight of the Lord? The truth of the matter is that the king reflected the failure of the citizenry and at the same time the citizenry reflected the evil of the king.

It seems as though God's description worked equally well in either direction, both were at fault. However, the fact that God listed the king's failure so frequently seems to indicate that he appears to hold the poor leadership of the king as being more responsible than those he led. It is not just that it appears that way, it is that way, as I will show you.

During the Feast we saw the abominable behavior of Israel described in Ezekiel 16, I want us to direct our attention to another chapter in Ezekiel, chapter 34.

Ezekiel 34:1-10 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves. Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothes yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. My sheep wandered throughout all the mountains and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them." 'Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord' "As I live," says the Lord God, "Surely because

My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock”—“therefore, O Shepherds hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more, for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them.”

In this series of verses God is clearly identifying that over the long haul of Israel's history, the chief cause of the despicable behavior and the resulting cultural downfall was a massive breakdown of leadership. He uses the term shepherds as the source of the cause, but we will look at the picture in more detail. Please turn to Isaiah 1.

Isaiah 1:4-6 Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.

Israel is described here by Isaiah as a nation laden with iniquity. The breakdown, as Isaiah describes it, is from the top of the head to the soles of the feet, and that is from the highest governmental positions all the way down to the lowliest citizen in the realm.

It is very easy to assume that he means the church and its ministry by His use of the term shepherds. This is partly because Jesus, a religious figure, called himself a shepherd in John 10, and I am sure even before that the term shepherd was applied to the Levites who ministered in the way that they did. However, the Bible uses the term shepherd to designate anyone who was responsible for giving guidance to a community.

For example, David and Joshua were called shepherds. They were in high positions, as were Gentile kings, you can see that in Isaiah 44. They too were shepherds, and the fact that God so often stated the king as being evil, and thus the people followed the king's leadership, helps us to understand that the source of poor leadership was much broader than to restrict the term to religious leaders.

In today's language shepherds, in the national sense, includes the President, Prime Minister, royalty, our representatives in Congress, court justices all the way down to the local level, Burgess and chairman, or whatever local level in their government. It also includes leaders in corporations, education, and the leadership provided by entertainers. In other words, shepherds broadly includes anybody who should be providing righteous leadership. Then comes the most important shepherd in category of all—parents. Parents are children's first shepherds.

In the family of Adam and Eve, they simply did not follow through when they received their assignment from God. In the first generation, they produced a murderer. What kind of an influence did Cain have? Where were all of these people who were influencing in the community? They were not there. They were all members of Adam and Eve's family, so the influence from the family, from society, was not really very great by the time that Cain murdered Abel.

Adam and Eve did not do their job very well at all, and they began to set the pattern for everything that continued as it did after them. Please turn to Genesis 18. God gives us one of the reasons that He called Abraham.

Genesis 18:19 “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LOORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LOORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.”

That is interesting in that last phrase. Whether or not Abraham did his job in leading his family and his household was going to depend on whether he did what God told him to do in commanding his family. We know that he did, but I bring that to our attention because our calling is somewhat similar to Abraham. We are to take care of the same kind of responsibilities and that would include our childrearing responsibilities. Mark this scripture, because what it says is one of the major reasons why He called Abraham and it is also there as a pattern for you and me.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 “Hear O Israel: The LOORD our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the LOORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them down

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on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build.”

I wanted these verses because they are the very first set of commands given following the giving of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5. As God constructs the covenant, parents are strongly and broadly charged with leading their children both verbally and by example.

Adam and Eve did not follow through when they were given the responsibility and as each generation matured at that time, those lesser-trained children than God trained Adam and Eve went out into society, became the society leaders, and the separation from God and His ways gradually became wider and wider, until we got to the Flood and God had to do something in order to save the whole program, it was so bad.

Ezekiel 34 plainly showed that God accused the leadership of Israel of directing energy in a clearly self-centered manner. Their concern was with themselves, not with what they were charged by God to do. They cared more about themselves than they were charged with leading and that resulted in a parallel that happened similar to what happened just before the Flood.

Isaiah 59 shows that this is where lack of leadership leads. Adam and Eve set the pattern and with Abraham God says, I will turn that around. Think about the Flood, think about this in what we are experiencing today in the United States of America.

Isaiah 59:1-15 Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perversity. No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity. They hatch vipers eggs and weave the spiders web, he who eats of their eggs dies, and from that which is crushed a viper breaks out. Their webs will not become garments, nor will they cover themselves with their works; their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of

peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace. Therefore justice is far from us, nor does righteousness overtake us; we look for light, but there is darkness for brightness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness! We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noonday as at twilight; we are as dead men in desolate places. We all growl like bears, and moan sadly like doves; we look for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us. For our transgressions are multiplied before You, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them: In transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. So truth fails, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. Then the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice.

The first part of that chapter is God speaking, until you get to the break between verses 8 and 9, then from verse 9 on to where I stopped it is the public moaning and complaining about the condition they are in. This chapter is the conclusion of the three chapter series that can very easily be seen as a parallel of the period just prior to the Flood and at the same time a vivid portrayal of the very times we are living in.

Isaiah 57:1-6 The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart; merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil. He shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness. But come here, your sons of the sorceress, you offspring of the adulterer and the harlot! Whom do you ridicule? Against whom do you make a wide mouth and stick out the tongue? Are you not children of transgression, offspring of falsehood, inflaming yourselves with gods under every green tree, slaying the children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks? Among the smooth stones of the stream is your portion; they, they are your lot! Even to them you have poured a drink offering, you have offered a grain offering. Should I receive comfort in these?

Isaiah 59 is divided. First God speaks His accusations, and then Israel talks about the poor circumstances they are in. It shows that the people were praying to God, they recognized the kind of circumstance they were in, but God was not responding. Why did

He not respond? In a way the answer is very simple. He could see the people were miserable but they were not repenting. They could describe their anguish, they could describe their discomfort, and they did not like it that they were in it, so they cried out to God but they did not change their life.

The prayers were hypocritical. They made sacrifices but nothing changed in their hearts. Are you beginning to see why this leadership is the issue?

Isaiah 58:1-5 “Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness; and did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching God. ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, and ‘You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls and you take no notice?’ In fact in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?”

Their fasting was hypocritical. They were as guilty as could be and they did not like the circumstances they were in. Their fasting appears on the surface to be spiritually motivated but their fasting was in reality nothing more than a ritualistic externalism and which was based on those fasting's desire to appear religious. It was nothing more than a social practice. It is what we are supposed to do rather than their heart really being in it.

Isaiah 59:4 [NIV] No one calls for justice, no one pleads his case with integrity, they rely on empty arguments and speak lies, they conceive trouble and give birth to evil.

Genesis 6:5 says, “Every intent of the thoughts of their heart was only evil continually.” What kind of leadership can people like that give to a community? They cannot.

Everybody has to take it under his own counsel to do it himself regardless of what anybody else is doing, regardless of whether God answers the prayers of the people

around there who think they are making honest prayers to Him or not. There will be no change in the American society until it begins with individual families. That is what God requires of us. We do it regardless of what anybody else does, regardless of how bad things are in society, we are charged by God, as was Abraham, to simply do the right thing. He notices. There will never be a change unless it begins with me.

If we look at verse 4, because of the way it was, the result is a building misery for all concerned, and if we would follow the story line from the beginning of chapter 59, we would find that the people were appealing for relief from their misery. But God was not answering, because they were not repenting.

God is waiting for the true beginning of a sincere and substantial change led by the people turning to God, by obeying His word, and restoring justice in all of their personal doings. This is in regard to conduct and attitude that they were fully capable of understanding and doing. God is not asking too much of the people. He understands. He knows that they are unconverted, that they cannot keep the spirit of the law, but He was requiring of them what they were capable of producing.

God is not requiring repentance regarding attitudes in behavior that is beyond their carnal ability. Remember that when people came to John the Baptist, he charged those people who wanted to be baptized with those listening to him to bring forth fruit fitting for repentance.

From this chapter we can understand that at the time Isaiah gave this, murder was common, liars were overflowing in the community, truth was being trampled upon in every aspect of life. To the citizen truth had little or no value because he could no longer discern what is truth and what is not. This is a picture of our world and it is written right in the book of Isaiah. This is not the Flood, and we have not changed from the time of Isaiah.

Since it is clearly seen that the church fits no place in this world, in terms of having any future worth preparing for, where do we turn? We find ourselves in it, where do we turn? This is one of the reasons why I gave that whole series of sermons on where the characteristics of the church come from. Why are we so different? What is our world view? This is a picture of what our world is right now and it gives us a pretty good idea of what we are going to be living in right on up to the conclusion when Jesus Christ returns.

We, the church as an institution, stand alone. The church is unique, nobody has the characteristics of the church of God, because those characteristics have come from

God. He is the one producing the characteristics in His children. The result of this in a practical sense is that the church is as if we are in a no man's land. In relation to God it is pretty good. We do not want to be in that land, it is better to be isolated from these people in terms of having a lot to do with them in the normal function of life.

Our characteristics comes from Christ. He makes it very clear in the New Testament that He was hated, He was rejected by men, and He said do not be surprised if men reject you too. The reason He could say that with full assurance that it was going to happen is because He understood that Satan was the one who is actually doing the persecuting, motivating people within the community and work place and everywhere to do that. What we are persecuted for are the characteristics that God is building within us.

John 17:3 "And this is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

The church is a very small group living by faith with no future in the world, and persecution is gradually intensifying. The unconverted sheep in the world will continue milling about in confusion but what I want you to remember to not forget this term—eternal life. In this case it does not indicate life that is endless. Rather it is a kind of life, it is a quality of life, it is the quality of life that God lives.

What this verse is saying really to you and me, is that eternal life is the highest quality of life available to the called of God. The conclusion is that there is no alternative other than for us to choose eternal life as our aim, as our goal, as the standard of life that we want to live. In order for this to be achieved we must live by faith, we must keep the commandments, and there is no other true alternative regarding either of those two.

The world, not just this nation, is totally lost spiritually. We do not turn our attention to God out of desperation as if being forced simply because there is nothing else available. There is a two or three step program consisting of study and teaching that will help in preparation for what is coming. It takes into consideration the value of our heritage and helps solidify our awareness of where we stand in these times.

Luke 14:25-33 Now great multitudes were with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. [This is what we vowed when we got baptized, our

loyalty to Jesus Christ.] For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

This is the price we pay, it is not paid all at once, it is paid as we grow and see what we are doing is wrong, it does not fit the pattern of righteousness that God gives and we want to glorify God, it is something that we have to jettison and begin to work to overcome this so that it is no longer a defiling part of our character

Luke 14:34-35 Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear let him hear!”

This vow that we made is not without cost to us. What we did when we got baptized is, we pledged that in exchange for the forgiveness of sins and release from the death penalty, we would in turn by faith give our life to Him to do as He desires. We literally gave our life to Him. He became our owner, we became His slave.

I spoke about our awesome heritage twice during the Feast. The term heritage is defined first as ‘something not earned.’ It comes into your possession, it was given. A heritage is something not earned. In this our particular case, what came to us is a cultural heritage. The cultural heritage of the Israel of God is derived from the Kingdom of God, it comes to us by being called into it, accepting it, and growing within that culture—not the world’s culture. The world cannot see, the world cannot comprehend the culture of the Kingdom of God. That is why they want to persecute it. For us that culture is the means to salvation because at the very head of that culture is our God and Savior.

We have to accept it and grow within it. And the dictionary defines culture as ‘the development of mind, morals, and taste.’ Is God’s mind different from the mind that rules this world? Are God’s morals different? Is God’s taste different? Absolutely, and they are to become ours and we yield to Jesus Christ in order that this occurs.

That is why I say, we have to embrace the culture of the Kingdom of God and make it a part of our life. That means live the terms of the culture of the Kingdom of God the very best we possibly can. There is a great deal we have to make a part of life in order that we will be qualified to lead that culture in the future and give it to others. We have to be practicing it ourselves, we have to be following it first in order to become qualified to teach it to others.

So, we are to actively embrace the Kingdom of God's culture and at the same time live it and pass it on to our children so that they can see the sense that we are being the last of a long line of ancestors who preceded us and performed great things in the same program we are involved in.

This is why I named all of those names near the end of the Feast, because those people are our ancestors in this culture—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. They are our heroes as it were, they provided the teaching for us to follow.

Satan has duped people into almost exclusively desiring what they can *get* from God, and that is salvation. That is not unusual because they see what God is doing only on a very limited basis. Do you really believe that it is wise to marry someone you hardly know anything about including their hopes, dreams, standards, and what they have done? We are going to marry Jesus Christ and what He did is written in this Book. This is why John 17:3 is written in the Bible encouraging us to pursue the way of God and come to know Him, so that we can copy the way of God and come to know Him at the same time.

There is an exceedingly valuable alternative open to us for guidance. It is a reality that is open to us that is essential not just to our understanding but, very importantly, to our sense of responsibilities and level of loyalty to God. Why? Because knowing the elements involved in this brings a greater depth of knowing God and His purpose. I am talking in the background of this is the covenant.

The covenants are a major aspect of our heritage and our children's as well. We rarely pay any attention to them but know this well because they will buck you and your children's faith because they flesh out the value of our heritage.

Why the covenants? The major reason is because the covenants most precisely of all things in the Bible concisely define our relationship with God and our responsibility to God, and it is by submitting to them that we come to know God.

Eternal life dwells within the parameters of our relationship with God, and God

commands that we seek Him. What could possibly be more informing for us to do than to follow what the covenants say? His commandments are contained within the covenants. I am not just speaking the Ten Commandments. It is God's commandments that are important to Him for a relationship with Him. His commandments are contained within the covenants, they detail the terms of our relationship with Him, with each other, and with the world, and they are very helpful toward shaping your child's mind toward God—especially if you are living them too.

It is within them that He guides us more precisely toward what we must do to please Him and to prepare for the Kingdom of God. There are basic elements regarding them that are very helpful that we understand.

First, we must begin by understanding that each covenant is a legal arrangement that establishes a defined relationship with the unseen Almighty God. There are quite a number of covenants in the Bible, there are eight or nine at least. Not just the old and new, there are other covenants there that teach us important things about the way our God thinks, and about what He requires of us as a result of what He thinks.

The unseen aspect of this relationship is a major reason why faith is necessary. We interact with the invisible God through something we can see and understand, that is, the Bible. That is where He lets us know His mind and because we know His mind we come to understand Him and why He acts and reacts the way He does. It is written in the Book, and so often those things are in the covenants.

The covenants are not as complex as we might fear. We have to guide our thinking away from the covenants as being coldly rigid, legalistic, and impersonal. That is what the world has done because of Satan. He puts that thought in them that covenants are bad. No! Covenants are great, they are a wonderful gift because God makes it so plain what He desires of us. It is spelled out for us practically.

We must not think of the covenants as being coldly rigid, legalistic, and impersonal. They are legal and binding but we are united within them by means of, and because of, the merciful kindness of the most loving Being that exists. They are a gift of love from God so that we do not misunderstand.

We will turn to Scripture that provides a foundation. The foundation for us is that we not only believe God but He is sovereign over His entire creation and He is faithful to do what He says He will do. That has to be in place for us for the greatest result to be produced.

Deuteronomy 5:5-6 “I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up the mountain.” He said: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

Our God *is* God and He identifies Himself with those that He brought out of Egypt. I do not think that I could turn to any place that would be plainer that this is the one we are dealing with just like the Israelites did.

Deuteronomy 5:7 “You shall have no other gods before Me.

Our God is God. That is the foundation of our life! In a sense there is nothing more important than that. I also said that the book of Deuteronomy is almost stridently insistent in that He identifies Himself so frequently in the book of Deuteronomy, “I am God.” You are dealing with God.

Deuteronomy 7:7-9 “The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments.”

He wants that drilled into our minds—He is God and He is faithful. This is important in regard to covenants. It is impossible for God to lie and what He says in those covenants sets down the standards of the requirements that He has made for us to have in relation to Him and to please Him. Not only that: in the covenants He gives wonderful promises of what He will do and He is faithful.

We are dealing with someone of absolute truth and the power to do whatever He says. Consider this: the major difference between us and the unconverted of the world is they simply do not look to God as Creator or as the Sovereign ruler of His creation. He is either one or both to them but He is not the supreme authority in their lives. This is the reason they do not obey Him. They do not look to Him as someone they really have to please in every area of life.

They might think that is something too big for me to swallow, but if they were really seeking God, and they were doing it honestly and thoroughly over a long period of time, and they really had their life committed to Him because of what He is, why do they not keep the Sabbath? That is almost so simple it is incredible. It is not complicated at all. It is simply evidence they really do not believe Him.

To them what rules as supreme is what they desire, even as with Adam and Eve. Their sin is, in a sense, so incredible. They saw God with their own eyes, they saw God, the one who created them, and yet in the presence of Satan, that quickly, they rejected Him. That is what a grip Satan has on us through human nature and that is the way the world is and is why they do not really commit themselves in truth to God and His covenants.