

Leadership And Covenants (Part Fifteen)

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I titled this series before the Feast of Tabernacles “Leadership and Covenants.” Leadership, because an overview of what God clearly shows in what He emphasizes within His Word of how greatly the quality of leadership impacts on those who are following. Consider the impact of various kings of Israel had on the citizenry. Think of what happened in the nation led by a David, Hezekiah, or Josiah, as compared to the significantly declining leadership of Solomon as he deteriorated spiritually in his rule over Israel. The decline was so significant that after he died it produced a rift in Israel great enough to divide it into two nations. That was 3,000 years ago and they have not been united since.

The conclusion is obvious. As God shows in His Word, the quality of leadership makes a huge difference in practice, whether in a family, community, or even an entire nation. When I began this series I was not thinking of any of us being called upon to lead a nation. My view was not that high, nor that broad. I was thinking of family leadership. That is something that all of us have experience with and a need for, therefore the need to learn what God is looking for in us.

I believe that it was an American philosopher, Henry David Thoreau, who said, “Every institution is but the length and shadow of one man.” A family is an institution, it is the institution that God created to prepare people for a productive adulthood. Thoreau was essentially saying, whether we like it or not, whether we are able to realize it or not, whether even if we are aware of it or not, parents are casting an influence for good or bad, or indifference, upon those children that they lead. Therefore parents are to some degree responsible for what that influence produces.

We heard some of the things that Richard was saying that was produced within the families of America. I think that it is very clear that the quality of the influence God greatly respects and desires in His children is their spiritual influence.

How many times is God's evaluation of leaders termed in this way? he did that which is right in the eyes of God, or he did that which was evil, those two statements clearly state God's priority regarding the quality of the influence that He desires that His family casts.

John 15:7-8 “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

This standard is set before all of God's Family. In other places in His Word, God shows that living by faith is a requirement, and He will give every grace needed by His children to accomplish this before the world.

We will touch on a familiar scripture because we may think that our way is somewhat too hard. If you are one who thinks your trial, your way that God has placed before you is too difficult, notice this:

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as in common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

This is a flat-out promise from Him to each of us. Our Creator is not in the business of attempting to lose us! God is in the business of building up, not tearing down, and believing this as a part of our life every day is invaluable.

We will take another look at Noah. You think you had a hard job? I do not think that any of us have anything close to what Noah had to face. It was not long ago Hollywood made a film involving Noah and the Flood. I felt, though I had no interest to see it, and never did, that they chose the wrong actor to portray Noah in the starring role. I did not know that much about

Noah then as I do now, but even then I felt that they chose the wrong man. They chose a man who is known for starring roles that generally call for action, especially violent action in which he is leading an army of warriors and a large group of fellow warriors, following him to victory.

The man I would have chosen to play Noah would have been Tom Hanks. Tom Hanks is Hollywood's best man for playing what the critics call an every-man role. That gives you an idea of what I think about Noah, he was an every-man. The man I would have chosen is really Hollywood's best man for playing what critics call an every-man role. He is middle aged, he is not well built, he is frail by comparison to others, he is not ugly, but neither is he particularly handsome. He is like every normal man you might meet walking down the street. He is a fine actor, but he is noted for acting professionalism not as a romantic leading man, not as a heroic figure who rallies everyone together and they win the day over great odds. That is not the way I personally picture Noah.

God chose to rise to the occasion in this critical time of mankind's history. I want to take one last look at Noah before we move on to the next covenant. Turn to Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:1-2 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.

It was the consistently good use of their faith in God by which the elders obtained, not just the favor of God, but also the praise of God. There are about twenty names of the heroes of Israel, the hall of fame of the greats of faith in Israel.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

My thoughts about Noah are that he certainly fits here, he was a man of faith, of that there is no doubt.

Hebrews 11:7 By faith Noah, divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

I spent a good amount of time looking at the life and accomplishments of Noah and I think that it is interesting that God placed Noah's biography right at the beginning of His book, by His design.

Regarding the great heroes of faith named in Scripture, where would you rate Noah? He was not a warrior, he was not a king, he was not even a priest, let alone a high priest. He was not one who led a great mass of people to their liberty. He was not one who had verbal battles with a king having great authority. We all know he was a preacher of righteousness. In fact, we might even say he was a blue-collar worker who worked with his hands building a boat. Perhaps he seemingly built that huge boat in a portion of the earth where it had never rained. It took him 120 years, and while doing it he could possibly have received much verbal abuse for his efforts.

I read a scripture in Genesis 6 to you a couple of sermons back. We are going to look at it again, because I have learned something since then regarding this. It tells a great deal about Noah.

Genesis 6:22 Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.

I told you then that I believed that that best describes Noah's character within the context of the violent times he lived in leading up to and following the Flood—and the massive size of his assignment. He was a humble man who followed what God ordered. That was unique all by itself. This is what I found out since I read that verse to you: God says that same thing about Noah five times, in praise! That is impressive. Noah did what God said to do. When He said to build an ark, Noah did not flinch. He was a thinking man. There is no doubt about that. “A boat? What's a boat?” Apparently God told him and he started to work. That is really something.

Now we will go to the book of Ezekiel. We are going to add to that. And this is one to have in your memory bank.

Ezekiel 14:12-14 (The Living Bible) “Son of dust, when the people of this land sin against Me, then I will crush them with my fist, break off their food supply, and send famine to destroy both man and beast. Even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they alone would be saved by their righteousness, and I will destroy the remainder of Israel,” says, the Lord.

This puts Noah in an impressive category when he is listed with Daniel, let alone Job. God compares everybody in the nation against those three men; that their lives were worth more than all the others *combined*. That begins to put Noah into the stratosphere of men of faith. Does what it says here in any way even slightly alter your evaluation of Noah and what he accomplished?

Ezekiel gives us a much shorter hall of scriptural fame listing than Hebrew 11 does, revealing the names of those that God had very high respect for. Once again, on this list, there are no kings, no warriors, or religious leaders' names. We all know of Daniel because his biography is clearly stated in the book of Daniel. He was actually a contemporary of Ezekiel and he was already renowned, both to Ezekiel and to God.

We do not know a great deal about Job, but his integrity was highly respected by God. But look at whose name appears first in the listing in Ezekiel 14. Now, that could have been because of the time element in which he lived, but even so, it is really high praise from God. Ezekiel was written after both Israel and Judah were taken into captivity, roughly 800 to 900 years following Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, about four hundred years or so after David. And there were other significant leaders whose names God could have drawn upon for comparison's sake, but He did not. He skipped over David and others. He skipped over Abraham, the father of the faithful, and he said Noah, a man who we would probably think had no renown at all.

None of those three had the flashing brilliance of a charismatic leadership, but all three of them were exceptionally close to God, and God is marking them before our eyes because of their faithful, righteous character. God used them to accomplish great things and they did not do it on a battlefield or high office.

I want to return to Noah's story because it was far more significant and difficult than it appears on the surface. To me the surface of the period of which speak, and Noah lived in, is primarily that period leading up to the Flood. It must have been grueling, because God reports that every intent of man's heart was only evil continually. It must have been a hard time to live. Think of the stress of having to face that daily. But the story continues on, during the Flood and after the flood, but we might overlook that part. Please go back to Genesis 8.

Genesis 8:1 Then God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that were with in the ark. And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided.

Genesis 8:17-22 “Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you: birds and cattle and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. Every animal, every creeping thing, every bird, and whatever creeps on the earth, according to their families, went out of the ark.

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. Then the Lord said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.”

I believe, knowing myself and mankind as well, perhaps the greatest wonder of this entire retelling of the relationship featuring the human Noah and our God, is not that God remembered. He does not forget, His awareness of what is going on in His creation is beyond question. If you would take the time to read Psalm 78, you would see how God complains about how forgetful man is of the wonders that He did, the gifts that He gives, and all He did in Israel's behalf, yet He says, they remembered not.

Noah did not forget. The first thing he did was to make an offering. Considering much of what Noah experienced, Noah remembered God, because mankind is in the habit of forgetting. Mankind's nature is so focused on himself. But Noah's character was literally shaped by his relationship and experiences with God to seek God first—and he did.

Consider briefly an overview of what Noah experienced. He was apparently a child of a fairly good family. He was born into the holy line, but there was nothing significant that his family distinguished itself doing. It was not until Noah was 480 years old that he received the calling to build the ark.

Genesis 7:11-13 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights. On the very same day Noah and Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark.

The flood began in the six hundredth year of Noah's life. The rains came and the fountains of the great deep were broken up—every living thing on earth perished. Only those on the ark survived; the only ones left. He had already been involved for 120 years in this vast project that God was working in and through him and during that time he was also preaching. He may have been preaching for a great deal longer, but the commission to build the ark came in the four hundred and eightieth year of his life.

What was going through their minds? I do not think that we would just brush that off after spending all of that time building the boat that they were in, and ushering all of those animals in there. Besides that, he may have been preaching a good bit of that time, having the horrors of this already on his mind. Is possible that, like us, Noah felt like a failure? All of that preaching and apparently nobody, not even one person, ever repented. Talk about feeling as though you were a failure! But he kept at it despite the fact that nobody was repenting.

And now they were in the boat, they were in the ark, experiencing an undoubtedly pitching and careening up and down, being tossed around in the

churning waters. I began to wonder as I was writing that if they had something like seat belts. If they did not, they would be thrown around like ping pong balls inside, because earthquakes were going on all over the place pushing up geysers of water under the boat, and on every side of the boat. It would have been frightening to look out at that and know there is only a piece of wood between me and death.

Besides that, the animals had to be cared for, unless God somehow limited what might be required in a normal situation. But if they ever did look outside there was nothing to see but water—no trees, no flowers, no birds, just churning water. His mind was definitely affected, so was everybody else's, because the first thing the Bible records upon their leaving the ark was to make a thank offering for deliverance, and a sin offering by which he acknowledged he and his family's need for forgiveness and atonement.

It reveals without saying it what his relationship with God had created within his heart. No wonder God felt close to him. He could have easily left the ark remembering the hardships of his and his family's lives, and all of the dangers that they faced. He could have remembered the hardships endured in actually building the ark, he could have remembered the persecuting mocking that he and his family suffered once the population became aware of what they were building. He could have emphasized the violent pitching of the ark in his mind, as the great deep shuddered with violent eruptions, or having to care for the animals during that time that dragged on without anything to see but water.

In addition, it is apparent that God never spoke to him the entire time after they entered the ark. It could have easily been assumed that God had forgotten him. All of that time Noah and his family never had good solid ground under their feet, always the boat was moving.

Think of what struck Noah's eyes when they exited. He may have been thinking how thrilled he was looking forward to having good solid earth under their feet again. But what did he see? It could have been in his mind that he had witnessed firsthand the mighty power of God unleashing a judgment. It must have been overwhelming! He saw the judgment unfolding

in a way and extent that no other person outside of his family had ever experienced, and maybe that very thought hit his mind like a ton of bricks, reminding him that he was but a man.

Coming out of that ark was far different from what greeted the eyes of Adam and Eve when they were created. God had prepared vistas of a profusion of beauty for them, including a special garden created just for their use. Noah stepped into a world of deathly silence. No birds were twittering, deathly silence where nothing was taking place. There was no human activity. Recall that he was looking at the denuded hills of various colored mud, with bare roots of dead trees sticking up into the skies.

How many skeletons did he have to look at? I do not know. Perhaps he saw vast lakes of slowly receding water afloat with the flotsam and jetsam of woody debris. How could he not have at least a passing thought, wondering if that water rose once again what would happen to his family this time. What was to prevent his family from perishing if that happened again? That thought may have been what reminded Noah of what he had to do in making the offerings to God.

Perhaps we also need to be reminded that Noah did not know it, he still yet had to live and work another three hundred and fifty years of rebuilding, repopulating, resettling, and governing the earth. You think your job of faith is hard? No wonder the guy got drunk after he began growing grapes! He lived the second longest of any person in the history of mankind. Only Methuselah exceeded him. And that whole time he was working for God.

None of us have been given a job even coming close to what happened with Noah. It is no wonder he is rated so high by God. I do not think, except for that getting drunk, there is one eyelash of complaint from Noah. He just said, yes Lord, and did what He said.

I know I probably did not describe Noah's ordeal and his family's ordeal, but nonetheless, God had one more blessing to him. He became the first man that God directly made a covenant with. Abraham was second, so that puts him into a pretty good category there. There is no doubt that God explained things to Adam and Eve but not in the same way that God taught Noah to perform his job.

Genesis 6:17-18 “And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons wives with you.”

Verse 18 is also notable because it is the first time the term covenant is used in the Scriptures. Thus we have moved through only six chapters of the book of Genesis and two very significant terms are used, and both of them in the history involving Noah and his relationship with God: grace and covenants.

The covenants that God tendered toward Israel, because each one made adjustments to the responsibilities of mankind so that those who follow, including us, would be well informed as to what and why one must do within their lives to succeed within the frameworks of what God is working out.

Covenant is yet another biblically significant term from this Flood-Noah context. After this point it appears fairly often, in fact, 252 more times in the Old Testament, and 20 times in the New. It is a significant term. First, because of what the term covenant means to our lives, and therefore our salvation. I believe that the modern legal terminology is clearly adequate for defining the term.

A covenant is a legal document establishing the terms of a relationship between parties involved together in the accomplishment of a purpose. There is a difference between God's covenants made with mankind, and covenants made between men. God's covenants, though extremely fair, are all *imposed*. There is no dickering, no give-and-take bargaining with God, He just imposes them through an announcement. Even though this is the first time that the term covenant appears, this does not mean that it is the first time in the sense of a covenant appears in the Bible. And it is far and away not the last, but one of several to come as God's purpose unfolds.

I am going into this because the world has the idea that God has saved people in the past on the basis of their works, but now on the basis of grace. That is *not* true. Turn back to Deuteronomy 29 to pick up on what a covenant does for us.

Deuteronomy 29:29 “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

Covenants reveal responsibilities. That is the long and the short of it, so that we are not in the dark as to what God requires. Thus what men term as the Edenic covenant is indeed a covenant even though it does not appear with things listed one right after the other. What the covenant said is clearly explained. It sets the terms of the relationship between the Creator and those He gave life to in Genesis 1. Though imposed it is not announced though. The terms established man's responsibilities. Then the authorizations of that covenant caused by God's adding of the judgments is termed by some as the Adamic covenant. Those factors, those judgments seriously altered life on Planet Earth, and it was brought on by sin.

God wanted to make it exceedingly clear why things changed. And it was the sins that did it. So they are a part of that Adamic covenant so that we understand clearly, then the apostle Paul shows right down to this day in Romans 8, that it is still in effect.

Here is a truth, and mark it well in your mind: the sins and their judgments not only altered the lives of Adam and Eve, but all who came after. It had a universal effect. Each covenant reveals God's purpose more explicitly and makes a few adjustments to the relationship. But overall, when you put them all together, as the clearer “big picture” unfolds, the covenants reveal that God's purpose *never* changed from the beginning.

The emphasis in all of the covenants is on God's purpose. The covenants then impose what God requires of mankind to be part of His purpose. That is as clear an explanation that I can give you. That is one reason why we are going through them. New elements were introduced as God's purpose is progressively developed for mankind's understanding. Each distinguishing mark of His purpose unfolded as those sanctified had need to understand its place in what was happening. Those sanctified includes you and me.

What the big picture reveals is that mankind's responsibility to his Creator and fellow man has never, never, never changed from the beginning. For

example, mankind has never been saved by works; mankind has *always* been saved by grace. Do you understand that this is why grace is revealed so early in the Bible? In fact, even though the word does not appear until chapter 6, we understand now once we understand grace, that it has been preached from the very beginning. Everything that God did for Adam and Eve to live was an act of grace. That is why grace is revealed so early, this is why covenants are revealed early; both in the sixth chapter of Genesis, both of them in the life of Noah.

To show you that nothing changes in God's relationship to those He has called, mankind has always been required to submit to the Creator regardless of the terms of a given covenant. We have *always* been required to keep the Ten Commandments, we have *always* been saved by grace. That is never changed from the beginning.

We have sinned from the beginning. God knew from the beginning that we would sin. He did not make us sin; He shows us we have all deliberately chosen to sin, and that includes Adam and Eve. They could have resisted Satan but they did not. They deliberately chose to sin. Adam deliberately chose to take his wife's advice—he should have resisted. The motivation for our submission to God has always been this wonderful mixture of trust in His Word, that is, faith, combined with a deep personal love for Him and what He is in His character. He is love.

Once we get that straight it makes choosing the right thing to do a great deal easier. If God says “do not” about something, it is because He loves us, not that He is trying to deny us good. He is trying to save us from evil. That is why we can confidently say, Eve deliberately sinned. God had already told her “Do not eat of that tree.” They discounted what He said and deliberately sinned, and we have all followed the same way.

Here is another way you can understand this. The Scriptures tells us that Christ is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Before God even began to unravel what He is creating, Christ was already a dead man. Because He knew we would sin, He knew we would need a Savior.

It shows the depth of Their love, that even before they began He was going to die. He was going to have to give up being God with all of that power and die for those who were killing Him.

The covenant that God made with Noah is called by researchers the Noahic covenant. It too is a universal covenant—it applies to everybody—it is still in effect. It is made with Noah, but still applies to everybody, and the purpose is to redefine the relationship of God with all of mankind. It was announced immediately after the entire population of the earth was wiped out by flood, and only eight people remained.

The covenant was given at least partly so that Noah, and ultimately all of mankind, would come to know that the Flood did not do away with either the Edenic or the Adamic covenant one. The Flood was devastating to say the least. But we are still responsible to obey the Ten Commandments and the flood did not change God's purpose. Everything in the Adamic covenant remained in effect included all of the judgments.

Genesis 8:21-22 And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. Then the Lord said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.”

He really spells it out, it is part of this covenant.

Genesis 9:1 God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.”

As with Adam and Eve, the responsibility to populate the earth is reaffirmed, only to Noah and his family not Adam and Eve. He is showing He is carrying through with the way things were at the beginning.

Genesis 9:2 “And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move

on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand.”

Mankind retains dominion over animal life as in the other covenants, but a new twist is added. Now animals will fear man from this time forward. I think it was partly given by God to give animals a fighting chance. He saw how vicious man was.

Genesis 9:3-4 “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.”

This is the first indication in the Bible that mankind is permitted to eat the flesh of animals but at the same time admonished not to eat the flesh with the blood in it. This is out of respect for the animals being sacrificed for our benefit.

Incidentally, there is a possibility that they did eat flesh before this time. That possibility is supplied by the fact that we know that they were making sacrifices. Cain and Able made sacrifices and at least one of those they were required to eat, which was the thank offering. They were to eat a portion of it and share it with others. If they gave thank offerings or did not at that time, then they did not have any, and it does not say what kind of offerings they made except for the one offering with Cain and Abel.

Genesis 9:5 “Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man.”

What this does is it officially establishes human government. Most scholars also believe that it is unthinkable that there was not some form of human government before the Flood. I agree with them. From the time of Adam and Eve to the time of the Flood there was some form of human government, but this is the first time that it is really established formally by God.

This one also includes that the government has the authority to carry out a death penalty for the shedding of human blood by another human being.

Even if an animal killed a person the animal was to be put to death as well. This formally, clearly establishes human government on earth.

I want to give you a couple of indications that show back in the New Testament that there indeed was human government.

Luke 17:26-27 [Jesus is speaking] “And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.”

These verses, because they compare times of life just before the Flood, Jesus is doing it with the ways of life lived today, it is a strong indication that even as we have government today, they also did then, otherwise the comparison that Jesus gives is invalid.

In the book of Jude it gives some indication of some sort of picture into the size of the population.

Jude 14-15 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”

The bringing of Enoch into the overall context indicates a fairly large earthly population and thus government to maintain control. If the population was not large, why would God need such a large force of His saints?

Genesis 9:9-10 “And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth.”

This is a first regarding biblical covenants. The covenant is directly confirmed to Noah because he was the head of the human family, but it applies not just to Noah, but also to all of his descendants and even every living creature, God makes this promise to.

Genesis 9:11-17 “Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and it shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that on earth.”

I hope that you will take a little bit different look at Noah. He was quite a man.