

## WHO ARE THE COVENANTERS?

By Michael Wagner (March, 2010)

Covenanters are people who believe in the continuing obligation of Christians to uphold the National Covenant of Scotland (1638) and the Solemn League and Covenant (1643).

During the Protestant Reformation, the Reformers acknowledged the Biblical practice of God's people publicly binding themselves to Him through public covenants, just as Israel had done on a few occasions in the Old Testament. Scotland made such a National Covenant with God in 1581.

In 1638 the civil rulers and Church of Scotland renewed this National Covenant to uphold the true Reformed religion against the imposition of man-made religious rites that were desired by King Charles I.

When the English Civil War broke out a few years later, the Parliament of England made a covenant with Scotland and Ireland, called the Solemn League and Covenant, whereby all three nations bound themselves to uphold Biblical truth in their churches and civil governments.

Binding themselves in this way to follow the Bible in church and state was called "Covenanted Reformation." The Westminster Assembly produced its documents, including the Confession of Faith, and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, in fulfillment of the Solemn League's obligation for these churches to profess the one true Biblical religion. That is, the Westminster Standards are the product of Britain's Covenanted Reformation.

Parliament won the civil war against King Charles I, but the leader of the Parliament's army, Oliver Cromwell, seized power and ignored the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant. After Cromwell died, King Charles II was enthroned after publicly taking the Solemn League and Covenant himself. However, he subsequently repudiated the Solemn League and Covenant and violently persecuted those who sought to uphold it and the Biblical truths it expressed. These persecuted people were called "Covenanters." Thousands of them were martyred for upholding the truth, but most people in Britain decided to take the easy road, and forsook the Covenant.

Charles II's successor, James II, continued the bloody persecution of Covenanters as he attempted to re-claim Britain for the Papacy. James was subsequently overthrown by the Dutch Protestant statesman William of Orange in the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688. Although William put a stop to the violent persecution of Covenanters, he too refused to abide by the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant.

Those who have since continued to maintain that the National Covenant and Solemn League and Covenant are binding because they are Biblically-based covenants made with God, are still known as Covenanters. Since the eighteenth century they have also been

known as Reformed Presbyterians. Unfortunately, many Reformed Presbyterians today no longer value or uphold their Biblical, Covenantal heritage.

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