

END-TIMES ISSUES

#16 Covenants – Introduction; covenants between individuals.

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1

The END has arrived.

It's at the door.

It's about to kick open the door.

AND WE ARE NOT READY.
(Or are we?)

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2

★ COVENANTS. ★

★ Getting the FULL picture. ★

People *cannot* understand Scripture, if they don't understand Covenants.

➡ This is because God's interaction with humans is based on covenants. ⬅

3

What do COVENANTS accomplish?

They:

- ✓ Define what God is doing in this world.
- ✓ Show us where history is headed.
- ✓ Explain many of the actions of godly people in the past.
- ✓ Teach us the relationship that exists between us and God.
- ✓ Are the only reason we can have hope.

Why do so few Christians consider them significant?

- ✓ Many focus on selected topics or passages, and don't look at the over-all picture.
- ✓ Few recognize the Bible as being a revelation of how God is using history to move us toward a final goal.
- ✓ Most people get their views of the Bible from someone else, and don't study it themselves.

★ We live in a society that downplays facts and truth.

4

Why should we learn about covenants?

- ✓ Some of them apply to us, and we will be held accountable by God for our response to them.
 - Obligations found in the covenants may be mentioned in other Scripture passages. We might be obeying them and not realize it. *But how do we know, without studying the covenants?*
- ✓ Sometimes the little that we *do* hear about covenants is a *misrepresentation* of them. **Example:**
 - Some people say that the Old Covenant (or "the Law of Moses") is legalistic, harsh, and (now that Jesus has come) totally irrelevant. Yet this covenant is often connected to the word "*love*"! And the *New Testament* considered it relevant!

"Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his **covenant of love** with those who love him and keep his commandments, ..."

Daniel 9:4b (NIV)

5

So, what are covenants?

We don't often use this word... but we *do* use words that are similar in nature. (Their meanings are not always 100% identical).

- ✓ **Examples:** Covenant, will, testament, alliance, treaty, agreement, pact, contract, promise, pledge.
- ✓ It's more than a promise (as we tend to use that term). It's a *solemn, binding* promise that places *obligations* on one or both of the individuals/groups involved.
- ✓ It's a *chosen* relationship, involving prerequisites, obligations, and privileges. It's more than a contract, because it is personal.

The Bible is *not* a random collection of past events, but a **series of events that are moving toward a final goal.** There is **purpose** and meaning, not random meaninglessness. Covenants are the "backbone" of this progression.

6

How are covenants made?

Covenants involve two parties, and describes the relationship between them.

- ✓ The two parties may be people-and-people (groups or individuals), or God-and-people.
- ✓ It may be made between "equals" (example: friends); or between a "superior" and an "inferior" (example: a king and his subjects).
- ✓ *It may affect people not present.* This may happen when an individual acts as a representative of a group of people. It may also impact future generations - children not yet born.
- ✓ The covenant may be:
 - "Conditional" – in which *both* parties have obligations and responsibilities that must be followed.
 - "Unconditional" – in which *one* party makes a commitment that does not depend on anything the other party does.

7

Covenants may be formally ratified (put into effect) in a number of ways.

- ✓ Today, we often use notarized signatures. In the days of the Bible, it was often sealed with a blood sacrifice, the death of an animal.
- ✓ Oaths, promises, or vows may be made. Often they're made "in the sight of God." Curses (punishments, sometimes even death) may even be invoked for anyone who breaks the covenant. ("May God judge me if I break this covenant!")
- ✓ There may be witnesses. There may be a ceremony or a meal.
- ✓ There may be symbols or signs, to serve as a reminder in the years that follow.

As we look at covenants in the Bible, we will be able to observe many of these characteristics. The specific details will depend on the nature of the covenant.

8

Covenants are a very serious matter.

- ✓ When God makes a covenant with us, he never wavers. He remains loyal to his promise.
- ✓ When we make covenants/promises with others, *God expects us to follow his example.*

When describing the covenant under which Christ saves us, Paul made a statement about everyday life ...

Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as **no one can set aside or add to** a human **covenant** that has been duly established, so it is in this case.

Galatians 3:15 (NIV)

Unfortunately, our society has become so corrupt, that people will look for any way possible to get themselves out of just about any contract or covenant. *We can thank God that Jesus is not like that ... and then follow his example!*

9

Examples of covenants made by individuals.

PEACE TREATY, OR COVENANT OF NONAGGRESSION – made between Laban and Jacob.

"Come now, let us make a **covenant**, you and I, and let it serve as a **witness between you and me.**"

Genesis 31:44 (BSB)

- ✓ People often use Laban's saying, "*May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are absent from each other*" (v. 49b) as an expression of friendship and love.
 - Ironically, Laban said it as an expression of *distrust!* Laban was a deceiving cheat, who was constantly taking advantage of Jacob. When God reversed their fortunes, Laban blamed Jacob!

10

A COVENANT OF FRIENDSHIP – made between Jonathan and David.

Then Jonathan made a **covenant** with David because **he loved him as himself.**

1 Samuel 18:3 (BSB); see also 20:16; 22:8; 23:18.

- ✓ The closeness of their friendship can be seen in chapters 18-20; and in 23:15-18. Some passages in 2 Samuel show how this covenant influenced David's words and actions in various matters, *even after Jonathan had died.*
- ✓ The horribleness of one who *violates* his covenant of friendship is seen throughout Psalm 55. It's a *betrayal.*

My companion attacks his friends; **he violates his covenant.**

Psalms 55:20 (NIV); see also vs. 12-14.

11

A COVENANT OF MARRIAGE – a very serious matter.

① A picture of God and his people.

- ✓ Many passages describe faithfulness to *God* in terms of faithfulness within a *marriage*. When people claim to belong to God, yet pursue the things of the world, Scripture describes it as "adultery."
- ✓ The following passage describes God's love to Israel, in terms of a marriage. (The New Testament also has a "marriage analogy": the relationship between Christ and the church – Ephesians 5:22-33.)

I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a **covenant** with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine.

Ezekiel 16:8b (NIV)

- ✓ Based on this marriage allegory, the rest of Ezekiel 16 describes Israel's turn to the most brazen types of prostitution. Yet in the end, God will turn the hearts of Israel back to him – by establishing the heart-changing New Covenant (= a future topic).

12

② The horribleness of divorce and sexual sin.

- ✓ When we consider the parallels between the concepts of *God-and-his-people*, and *husband-and-wife*, we can see the horribleness of divorce and sexual sin.
- ✓ Two passages focus on this issue. This shorter passage is a warning about the woman who has broken her covenant and become an adulteress. The wise man will avoid her.

Wisdom will save you also from the adulterous woman,
from the wayward woman with her seductive words,
who has left the partner of her youth
and ignored the **covenant** she **made before God**.

Surely her house leads down to death
and her paths to the spirits of the dead.

None who go to her return
or attain the paths of life.

Proverbs 2:16-19 (NIV)

This shows
how serious
the issue is!

13

- ✓ The second passage is more extensive, focusing on *two* issues: 1) spiritual unfaithfulness (which parallels unfaithfulness in marriage), and 2) the unfaithfulness of the man who divorces his wife. *Both situations have horrible consequences* – some of which are mentioned in this passage.
- ✓ The common thread throughout this passage is that of "breaking faith." Note the striking parallels and connections between various sections of this passage.

INTRODUCTION.

Don't we all have the same Father?
Hasn't one God created us all?

Then why do we **break faith** with each other,
and show contempt for the **covenant** God gave to our fathers?

Malachi 2:10 (DHT)

CONTINUED

14

BREAKING FAITH WITH GOD: AN ACT OF "SPIRITUAL ADULTERY."

Result: God is not impressed with our religious activities.

Judah **has broken faith**;
a horribly detestable thing has been done
in Israel and in Jerusalem.

Judah has shown contempt for the Lord's holy
place – the place He loves –
and has married the daughter of a foreign god.

May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob
every person who does this –
everyone who is aware of what he is doing,
and yet brings offerings to the Lord Almighty.

Malachi 2:11-12 (DHT)

CONTINUED

15

BREAKING FAITH WITH ONE'S WIFE: AN ACT OF VIOLENCE.

Result: Our religious activities mean *nothing* to God.

Here is another thing you do:

You cover the Lord's altar with tears,
with weeping and crying;

because he pays no attention to your offerings,
nor accepts them with pleasure from your hand.

You ask, "Why not?"

Because the Lord has been a witness
between you and the wife of your youth.

You **have broken faith** with her,
though she is your companion,
the wife of your **marriage covenant**.

Malachi 2:13-14 (DHT)

CONTINUED

16

Don't do it! Horrible consequences are just waiting to occur.

Didn't he make them one,
united in body and spirit?

And why one?

Because he wanted them to have godly offspring.

So guard your spirit,
and do not **break faith** with the wife of your youth.

For "I hate divorce,"
says the Lord God of Israel,
and "I hate when a person covers his garment with violence,"
says the Lord Almighty.

So guard yourself in your spirit,
and do not **break faith**.

Malachi 2:15-16 (DHT)

17

A COVENANT PERTAINING TO AN INHERITANCE, A WILL – and a surprising connection to Christ.

Note: The word that is translated as "a covenant"
(or in some translations, "a testament") is also
translated as "a will." *They are all the same concept.*

- ✓ Earlier, we pointed out that *death or sacrifice* was often associated with the ratifying of a covenant.
- ✓ This is true, even in the matter of *human wills*: *Death is involved!* The terms of the will (or covenant) are not *put into effect* ("ratified") *until the person has died*.
- ✓ This principle also applies to the New Covenant – which was the "will" (or "covenant") that Christ put into effect by *his* death.
- ✓ (The *Old* Covenant also required death, before it was put into effect. In that case, it was the death of an animal – a substitute for the people, until Christ could come to bring *permanent* forgiveness.)

18

Therefore Christ is the mediator of a **new covenant [= "will"]**, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, now that He has died to redeem them from the transgressions committed under the **first covenant**.

In the case of a **will**, it is necessary to establish the death of the one who made it, because **a will does not take effect until the one who made it has died; it cannot be executed while he is still alive**.

That is why even the **first covenant** was not put into effect without blood.

... and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Hebrews 9:15-18, 22b (BSB)

➔ *This principle is illustrated on the next page.* ➔

JESUS' "LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT."

Upon my death, I, Jesus, will that all who repent and put their trust in me will inherit my righteousness, and thus have eternal life.

THE DEATH ESTABLISHED...

In the case of a will, it is necessary to establish the death of the one who made it, because **a will does not take effect until the one who made it has died**; it cannot be executed while he is still alive.

Hebrews 9:16-17 (BSB)

THE WILL (COVENANT) PUT INTO EFFECT...

Therefore Christ is the mediator of a **new covenant [= "will"]**, so that those who are called may receive **the promised eternal inheritance**, now that He has died to redeem them from the transgressions committed under the **first covenant**.

Hebrews 9:15 (BSB)

There is one **BIG** difference!

Between:

OUR "Last Will and Testament" >> **AND** >> **JESUS'** "Last Will and Testament"

➔ For **Jesus'** "Last Will and Testament" to be accomplished, *Jesus had to come back to life!!*

➔ Our **human** "Last Will and Testaments" don't require this!

Covenants made by individuals... WHAT DO WE LEARN?

➔ We discover the seriousness of covenants... even those that many people would consider the *least* important.

➔ The *world* might consider them insignificant and little.

WHY SHOULD IT MATTER? I JUST PROMISED ONE PERSON... IT'S NOT LIKE I PROMISED THE WHOLE WORLD!

But the future judge sees them for what they are!

If people-people covenants are such a serious matter... *how much more serious are people-God covenants!*

Our MISSION:

➔ To recognize the seriousness of covenants and promises, and to let this fact influence all that we do.

➔ To take seriously, not just our covenants and promises, but *all that we say... so that people will never have to question whether or not we are being truthful!*

But let your **'yes' mean 'yes,'** and your **'no' mean 'no.'** Anything more than this is from the evil one.

Matthew 5:37 (CSB)

O Lord, who may stay in your tent? Who may live on your holy mountain? ...

The one who **makes a promise and does not break it,** even though he is hurt by it.

Psalm 15:1, 4b (GW)

= "Who can be in God's presence?"

Credits

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