


END-TIMES ISSUES



#18 Intro. to God-people covenants; God's eternal plan of redemption.

1

COVENANTS are a serious matter.

- ✓ They involve **truthfulness and trust**. Breaking a covenant is a *betrayal* of trust. *Don't do it!*
- ✓ They involve **values and choices**, whether it is *making* the covenants, or *responding* to them. Either way, the consequences can be far-reaching.

We illustrated these things by looking at various people-people covenants.

- ✓ We now plan to look at **God-people covenants**. In some respects, these are even more serious than people-people covenants; because they involve the one who can save or destroy for *eternity*.

2

Two characteristics that are common to most covenants.

- ✓ Generally, they are agreed upon by **both parties**. However:
 - An *unconditional* covenant does not necessarily require an agreement by the party that is not making the commitment.
 - Some human covenants may be *reluctantly* agreed to – such as a covenant (or treaty) that involves the "terms of surrender," after losing a war.
- ✓ In Scripture, they are often confirmed or sealed by an oath and a sacrifice.
 - It's like saying: "If I break this covenant, may my fate be like that of this animal that was killed."

We live in a day in which many people don't take promises and agreements very seriously. In reality, our words should *always* be truthful and reliable, even *without* making a promise or covenant!

3

God-people covenants: Typical characteristics.

- ✓ Those initiated by God.
 - Some of these covenants are *eternal*; at least one is *temporary*.
 - Most are *unconditional* (God says he will do something); at least one is *conditional* (what God does will depend on what the people do).
 - God will *never* fail to keep his promise. He won't break his covenants with people. (If they are broken, it's done by the *people*, not by God.)
- ✓ Those initiated by people.
 - These are generally a recommitment to obey God's covenant. (In the O. T., it was the covenant introduced by Moses.)
 - *Repentance* was a part of it... and this influenced their conduct.

4

Covenants that were initiated by people (examples).

- ✓ Joshua 24:25 – The people reaffirm their commitment to follow **only the LORD, the God of Israel**. (This commitment was short-lived.)
 - Joshua warned them that they *couldn't* remain loyal to God – he knew what their hearts were like – but the people confidently claimed that they *would*. Joshua also warned them about what would happen if they turned against God. (See chapters 23-24.)

Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the Lord. ..."
And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the Lord our God and obey him."
On that day Joshua made a **covenant** for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws.

Joshua 24:19a, 24-25 (NIV)

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- ✓ 2 Kings 11:17 – King Joash and the people covenanted to be the **LORD's people**. (See 2 Kings 11-12, and 2 Chronicles 23-24.)
 - This was *after* the wicked influences of King Ahaziah and then Queen Athaliah (a usurper).

Then Jehoiada [= high priest] made a **covenant** between the LORD and the king and the people that they would be the LORD's people.

2 Kings 11:17a (BSB)

- ✓ 2 Chronicles 29:10 – King Hezekiah covenanted to lead the nation **back to the ways of the LORD**. (See chapters 29-31.)
 - This was *after* the wicked influence of King Ahaz, which resulted in God's fierce anger overtaking the land.

Now it is in my heart to make a **covenant** with the LORD, the God of Israel, so that His fierce anger will turn away from us.

2 Chronicles 29:10 (BSB)

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- ✓ **2 Kings 23:3/2 Chronicles 34:31 – King Josiah and the people covenanted to follow God and to get rid of all false gods.** (See 2 Kings 23; 2 Chronicles 34:1-35:19.)

- This was *after* King Manasseh, who's wicked influence was so bad, that Josiah's reforms could only *delay* the coming judgment.

The king stood by the pillar and renewed the **covenant** in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the **covenant** written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the **covenant**.

2 Kings 23:3 (NIV)

The Kings/Chronicles situations involved people recommitting themselves to following the God of Israel (after a period of extreme apostasy), under the guidance of a godly king. Read the contexts to see how they lived-out their commitments.

7

Sin has consequences. Sometimes, deliberate sin results in consequences, where even the *best* option is not good.

- ✓ **Ezra 10:3 – The people covenanted to separate themselves from wicked influences.** (See Ezra 9-10.)

- God warned Israel to **NOT** under any circumstances intermarry with the Canaanites (and the related nations) – Exodus 34:16, etc. Yet even after their sins resulted in a 70-year exile, they were still quick to commit this sin!
- Ezra 9-10 records a time of repentance, in which those who were guilty dealt with their sin. The results were unpleasant... but not doing it would have sent the land back into idolatry. *The only COMPLETELY GOOD alternative was to NOT COMMIT THE SIN IN THE FIRST PLACE.*

So now let us make a **covenant** before our God to send away all the foreign wives and their children, ... Let it be done according to the Law.

Ezra 10:3 (BSB)

8

★ We can learn a lot from these covenants that were initiated by people.

- ✓ **From the 2 Kings / 2 Chronicles passages:**

- If we have wandered away from following Jesus, it is *good* to renew our commitment to follow him!

- ✓ **From the Joshua passage:**

- Their subsequent history (the end of Joshua and the book of Judges), is a warning that it is *easy* to slip into a sinful way of life.
- There is also a lesson about being self-confident, thinking that *we* (on our own) can be faithful to God. If we are not relying on *God* for the power to follow him, *we will fail just like Israel did.*

MORE →

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- ✓ **From the Ezra passage:**

- This should be a lesson about paying attention to God's instructions and warnings. Sin can have far-reaching consequences that hurt many people. Sometimes there may be no good solution for "undoing" it.

- ✓ **We could also add Jeremiah 34:8-22 (from last week) :**

- In this passage, the people covenanted with the king to release their Jewish slaves (in obedience to God) ... and then they changed their minds and re-enslaved them. Because of this, God promised them a horrible judgment.
- This should be a warning to us: Take your promises seriously... because God takes them seriously!
- When we admit the truth about our sin, and we repent ... but then go back to the sin, we are in a worse situation than we were before. (We just went from *bad* to *worse*, or from *evil* to *more evil*.)

10

Covenants that were initiated by God.

- ✓ **We plan to look at these in future weeks.**

- There are several that have a significant impact on how we should live. We need to understand the issues involved!

- ✓ **Some of these covenants are:**

- Covenant with Noah.
- Covenant(s) with Abraham. (Promises were made by God at different times. Some view them as *separate* covenants; others as different aspects of *one* covenant.)
- Covenant with Moses (made for the nation Israel), also called "the Law."
- Covenant with David.
- The New Covenant.

11

"Maybe/maybe-not" covenants.


- ✓ **What?!? Maybe/maybe not???**

- There are a small number of situations that *resemble* covenants (at least in some respects). People debate over whether or not they *are* covenants, but nothing in the passages says that they are.
- Sometimes people reach their views because their "theological systems" need them to be (or not be) covenants. But if our views require it to be a certain way, when God doesn't make it an issue, then maybe we need to revise *our* views, at least a little!
- We have chosen to keep with what God says in the Scriptures; and *not* get into this debate. If it was *really* that important, God would have said it (instead of leaving us to guess about it)!
- It's OK to have opinions on such matters. But it would be best to remember that they are nothing more than opinions. Otherwise, we are in danger of letting our opinions "reinterpret" these and other passages in Scripture. (This applies to other issues as well.)

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✓ Here is the *first* of these "maybe/maybe not" covenants:

There are three that people often mention. We plan to look at the others at a different time.



> The [Covenant of] Redemption. <

- Scripture tells us that, before the creation of the world, God *planned* to save us – to "redeem" us from our sins. He *paid* our penalty. This plan involved Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.
- This plan included *all* the things that would have to take place, in order for it to happen – including the Father's will, Jesus' death and resurrection, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the circumstances of our lives that would lead us to salvation!
- The "fact" of this redemptive plan is not the issue, since Scripture *does* mention these things. The question is whether or not we call it a "covenant."

13

Responding to the "covenant" issue.


- Many of the arguments used to promote the "covenant" idea are based on something like:
"[This verse or action] *seems to suggest* [that it is a covenant]."
- Viewing this as a covenant is less popular than it used to be. There may be both good and bad reasons for this.
 - ✓ Some people strongly disagree with this method of reasoning. [= Perhaps a good reason.]
 - ✓ Others are opposed, because it doesn't fit their views. [= This could be good *or* bad, depending on what their views are. (There is much false teaching in the church today.)]
- Regardless of our opinion on this "covenant" issue, let us rejoice and praise God for what Scripture *clearly* says! * →

* (...and *change* our views, if they don't agree with what Scripture says.)

14

What does Scripture say?

The God who created us lives *outside* of "time and space." Yet he communicates to us in terms that *we* can understand – which includes "time and space" terminology. We cannot have an *infinite* understanding of what God has done, but we can have an *accurate* (though *limited*) understanding of it.



Jesus was willing to come and do the will of the Father.

- This is from a Messianic Psalm, and is quoted in the New Testament:

"I **desire to do your will**, my God; your law is within my heart."

Psalms 40:8 (NIV); see vs. 6-8.

Hebrews 10 shows how Jesus fulfilled this.

15

What was "the will of the Father" that Jesus was willing to do?

- ❖ The Father planned that **Jesus would suffer humiliation and death**, in order to save many – **Isaiah 53**. (Afterwards, he would **return to life**, a reference to his resurrection – v. 11.)

Yet **it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer**, ...

After he has suffered, he will **see the light of life** and be satisfied; ...

Isaiah 53:10a, 11a (NIV)

- Romans 3:23-26 – Jesus became a "sacrifice of atonement" for us.
- John 17:1-5 – Jesus anticipated the ending of his humility, and his return to glory – sharing with the Father the same glory they originally shared.

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- ❖ The Father planned that Jesus would **rule over the nations, as both king and priest** – Psalm 110.

The LORD extends Your mighty scepter from Zion: "**Rule** in the midst of Your enemies."

The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind: "You are **a priest forever** in the order of Melchizedek."

Psa 110:2, 4 (BSB)

- This is also mentioned in Zechariah 6:12-13. (This passage was only *partly* fulfilled when the second temple was built.)
- John 17:1-5 – Jesus recognized that he has been given authority over *all* people (v. 2), and that *some* will be given eternal life.
- The book of Hebrews describes Jesus as our great high priest.
- Other passages describe Jesus as also being the *prophet* – Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; Acts 3:22-23; Luke 24:19; John 5:46; Mark 6:4.

17

The "Father's will" was that Jesus would do these things for us!

He was **chosen before the creation of the world**, but was revealed in these last times **for your sake**.

1 Peter 1:20 (NIV); see vs. 18-21.

This "your" refers to the people who belong to him.

Today, under the New Covenant, it refers to those who are willing to *follow* Jesus – those who are willing to: ① repent of their sins, and ② trust Jesus for salvation from sin and for the ability to obey him.
This is the "human responsibility" perspective of salvation.

Many of the Scripture passages we will examine have a focus on what *God* has done – often before creation even came into existence. *This is the "God's sovereignty" perspective of salvation.*

As always, Scripture presents these two perspectives as equally true – parallel concepts that are not in any way in conflict with each other.

18

In Jesus, we (his followers) have been chosen before the creation of the world ... for a purpose!

He did it...

- NOT because of anything special in us...
- But because of everything special in him!

... not because of anything we have done but because of **his own purpose and grace.**

2 Timothy 1:9b (NIV)

➡ So let's look at some of the things he did!

Four concepts that are often found in the following verses are:

- ① It happens "in Christ" (= the only way possible).
- ② It's God's plan/purpose/will.
- ③ It occurred before creation/time.
- ④ We are chosen/predestined/elect.

19

Why did he do this?

☞ To reveal his wisdom throughout the heavenly realms.

His intent was that now, through the church, **the manifold wisdom of God should be made known** to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to **his eternal purpose** that he accomplished **in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Ephesians 3:10-11 (NIV)

☞ For the praise of his glory.

In him [=Christ] we were also **chosen**, having been **predestined according to the plan** of him who works out everything in conformity with **the purpose of his will**, in order that we... might be **for the praise of his glory.**

And you also were included **in Christ** when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

Ephesians 1:11-13a (NIV); also v. 13b-14.

20

☞ So that we can live holy, blameless lives – a changed nature!

For He [= the Father] **chose us in Him** [= Jesus Christ] **before the foundation of the world** to be **holy and blameless** in His presence.

Ephesians 1:4 (BSB)

[God] has saved us and called us to a **holy life**—not because of anything we have done but because of **his own purpose** and grace.

2 Timothy 1:9a (NIV)

☞ So we can trust God, rely on the truth that changes lives, and look forward to eternal life.

[Paul's "assignment"...] ... to further the **faith** of God's **elect** and their knowledge of **the truth that leads to godliness**—in the **hope** of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised **before the beginning of time**, ...

Titus 1:1-2 (NIV)

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This means our future is secure!

☞ Yes, we **can** have a confident, secure hope for the future!

... the **hope** of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, **promised before the beginning of time**, ...

Titus 1:2b (NIV)

☞ This secure hope is the basis for great encouragement.

So when God wanted to make the unchanging nature of **His purpose** very clear to the heirs of the **promise**, He **guaranteed it with an oath.**

[Thus] we who have fled to take hold of the **hope** set before us may be **strongly encouraged.** We have this hope as **an anchor for the soul**, firm and secure.

Hebrews 6:17, 18b-19a (BSB)

22

We can look forward to the eternal city/kingdom (the New Jerusalem).

☞ We will be welcomed into the eternal kingdom of our God.

"Then the King will say ... 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, **inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.**'"

Matthew 25:34 (NLT)

☞ This is because our names are written in the Book of Life!

- Who **will** enter the eternal city?

... only those whose names are written in **the Lamb's Book of Life.**

Revelation 21:27b (BSB)

- Who **won't** enter the eternal city?

The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in **the book of life from the creation of the world** ...

Revelation 17:8b (NIV)

23

The ultimate reason all this can happen is because of God!

☞ **God planned it.** (Many verses mention his choosing or planning.)

In Him [= Christ] we were also **chosen** as God's own, having been **predestined** according to **the plan of Him who works out everything** by the counsel of **His will**, ...

Ephesians 1:11 (BSB)

☞ **God guaranteed it by two unchanging things.**

So when God wanted to make the unchanging nature of **His purpose** very clear to the heirs of **the promise**, He guaranteed it with **an oath.**

... by two unchangeable things in which it is **impossible for God to lie**, ...

Hebrews 6:17, 18b (BSB)

... the **hope of eternal life**, which God, who does not lie, promised **before the beginning of time**, ...

Titus 1:2b (NIV)

① His promise; ←
② his oath. (He can't lie about either.) ←

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↳ **God poured out his grace (undeserved kindness) on us.**

[God] has saved us and **called** us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of **his own purpose** and **grace**.

This **grace** was given us **in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time**, ...

2 Timothy 1:9 (NIV)

↳ **God accomplished it through Christ's sacrifice.** (*Many verses mention his sacrifice and what it accomplished.*)

This grace was given us **in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time**, ...

[Christ Jesus] ... who has **destroyed death** and has **brought life and immortality to light** through the gospel.

2 Timothy 1:9b, 10b (NIV)

25

↳ **God revealed it in the Good News, so that we could accept it.**

During the Old Testament era (before this Good News was revealed), people could still be saved. But certain details were a mystery – details that we *now* understand. Examples: ① *how* God planned to accomplish it, and ② the way that *Gentiles* would be included.

... this grace was given me: **to preach** to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and **to make plain** to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Ephesians 3:8b-9 (NIV)

... the hope of eternal life, ... which now at [God's] appointed season he has brought to light through **the preaching entrusted to me** by the command of God our Savior, ...

Titus 1:2b-3 (NIV)

(See also: 2 Timothy 1:9b, 10b, on previous slide.)

26

OUR MISSION...

In redemption, God offers us so *much*...

★ Cling to it! Live by it! ★

Think about it! What we are experiencing *now and in the future began before creation even existed!*

It's wonderful, whether or not we call it a "covenant"!

27

An important consideration:

What God offers is available only on *his* terms.

Have you taken up his offer?

God offers you an opportunity to have a part in this glorious adventure that began before time and space existed!

Are you willing to *repent* of your sin, and *trust* Jesus to save you, and *rely* on God's power so that you can obey him?

Did you at one time *begin* in this direction, but then get overtaken by the world?

Follow the examples of the Old Testament Jews – those who "rededicated" their lives to following God. (You will have to rely on God's power to make the change genuine and permanent.)

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Credits

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