

END-TIMES ISSUES

#28 "Forever" covenants.

"Forever" Covenants

Scripture describes some covenants as lasting "forever."

- It seems like there would be no problem understanding what this means... since "forever" means "forever" – doesn't it?
- The problem is that this involves an Old Testament Hebrew word, and their concept of "forever" did not always mean what we normally assume. Just like most words, there are a variety of possible meanings (normally understood by the context of the passage).
- A variety of possible meanings? Yes. But before we panic, we need to remember that this is true even with our English word "forever."

WE'VE BEEN STOPPED AT THIS LIGHT **FOREVER!**

WHEN WILL IT CHANGE TO 'GREEN,' SO WE CAN GO?

Our view... Their view... Time and eternity.

➔ For us, we tend to think of reality in two parts – one called "time" and the other called "eternity."

RIGHT NOW, WE LIVE IN "TIME"!

IN THE FUTURE, WE WILL LIVE IN "ETERNITY"!

"Forever" could mean: ① throughout eternity, or ② beginning now (or in the past) and continuing throughout eternity.

➔ For them, it was more like looking into the distant time; and it could refer to looking in either direction – forwards or backwards!

THE DISTANT PAST.

THE PRESENT TIME.

THE DISTANT FUTURE.

"Forever" could refer to unending time ... but it could also refer to a period of time that had a beginning and an end!

Here are some examples.*

(Which meaning does it have? In most cases, it is obvious! English translations will tend to use words that best represent what is meant, instead of the words "eternity" and "forever.")

The past:

- The Amalekites lived near the southern edge of Judah, from "ancient times" (= "forever/eternal") - 1 Samuel 27:8.
- We shouldn't follow the "ancient" (= "forever/eternal") path of the wicked – Job 22:15.
- Don't move the "ancient" (= "forever/eternal") boundary stones (= a matter of property rights) – Proverbs 23:10.
- They remembered the days "of old" (= "forever/eternal"), referring to the time of Moses – Isaiah 63:11.

* (Our focus is on the Old Testament concept. Only one New Testament passage focuses on an "eternal" covenant – the New Covenant, brought to us by Jesus. It has already begun, and will never come to an end.)

For a long time... (though NOT unending time):

- "May the king live 'forever'!" – Nehemiah 2:3. (Everyone knows he will eventually die!)
- The wicked are "always" (= "forever/eternal") carefree and gaining wealth – Psalm 73:12.
- Instructions for the person who desires to be someone's slave* "for life" (= "forever/eternal") – Exodus 21:6.

Eternal in duration, forever (as we tend to understand it):

- The future resurrection – some people will awake to "everlasting" life; others to shame and "everlasting" contempt – Daniel 12:2.
- God's love endures "forever" – Psalm 118:1.
- God's righteous laws are "eternal" – Psalm 119:160.
- God will be associated with Jerusalem "forever" – 2 Chronicles 33:4.

* (In the Bible, some types of slavery were almost like becoming a family member.)

Both past and future (in one sentence)?

- Praise the Lord "from everlasting to everlasting!" – Psalm 106:48.

In some situations, "forever" may be dependent on how the people respond; there may be requirements, in order for it to be fulfilled.

- God promised that Eli's family would minister as priests "forever"; but because of their sin, God later said they would be "cut short" ... and judged "forever" – 1 Samuel 2:30 and 3:13.
- God told Moses that the people (Israel) needed to have hearts that wanted to fear God and obey him... so that it would go well with them and with their children "forever" – Deuteronomy 5:29. (They went astray, and things did not go well with them.)

Note about Psalm 23:6 ("I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.")
This is actually a phrase that means "length of days." We who are saved will certainly be with God forever. But it's possible that David was mainly thinking about being with God throughout the remainder of his life – not denying the eternal perspective, but not focusing on it, either.

Which covenants are "forever"?

⇒ Covenants that are NOT designated as "forever":

- The "maybe/maybe-not" covenants. We are referring to various events or activities that *some* people claim are "covenants," even though the Bible doesn't say they are.

This includes: ❶ God's plan of redemption (which was planned before the creation of the world); ❷ the "creation mandate" (instructions and examples given to Adam); and ❸ the judgment (and promise of hope) that occurred when humans fell into sin.

- The **Mosaic Covenant** – also called the Law of Moses. Today, we call it the Old Covenant.

Even in the days of Moses, God alluded to a future covenant. By the time of the prophets, he was announcing to Israel that the *new* was going to replace the *old*.

(We plan to look at both of these covenants in the future.)

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👉 The Old (Mosaic) Covenant *couldn't* exist "forever"! 👉

- In Moses' day, God expressed the *need* for the people to have changed hearts. (They chose to *keep* their sinful hearts and pursue the gods of other nations.)

If only they had such a heart to fear Me and keep all My commandments always, so that it might be well with them and with their children **forever**.

Deuteronomy 5:29 (BSB)

- Moses spoke of a future day, when God would *change* people's hearts (Deuteronomy 30:6). Later, the prophets called it the New Covenant, and said it would replace the Old Covenant that was given through Moses (Jeremiah 31:31-34).
- When Jesus brought us the New Covenant (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 12:24), he made the old one obsolete.

By speaking of a new covenant, He has made the first one obsolete...

Hebrews 8:13a (BSB)

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⇒ Covenants that ARE designated as "forever":

- **Some initial considerations.**

- ✓ The *covenant* and the *sign* (reminder) of the covenant might both be described as "eternal."
- ✓ Some of the "eternal" covenants came with obligations that the people needed to obey. Those who didn't obey might *forfeit* their participation in the covenant; but it wouldn't cause the covenant itself to be cancelled.

- **How "forever" are these covenants (considering the meaning of the Hebrew word translated as "forever")?**

- ✓ Most of the covenants described as "forever" are recognized as being permanent.
- ✓ There are a few covenants described as "forever" that many people believe have come to an end, or were fulfilled when the New Covenant was put into effect. However, not everyone agrees on this.

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The Noahic Covenant.

- This covenant was made with the entire human race – and even with the animals and the earth!

"I now establish my **covenant** ..."

And God said, "This is **the sign of the covenant** ... a **covenant** for **all generations to come**: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be **the sign of the covenant** between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my **covenant** between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the **everlasting covenant** between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

Genesis 9:9a, 12–16 (NIV)

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The Abrahamic Covenant.

- This covenant was made with Abraham and his offspring. Ultimately, it proved to be much greater than we might have originally thought, because it expanded to include Gentiles (not just Jews) and the entire world (not just the land of Canaan).
- This covenant exists alongside some of the other covenants.
- Participation in this covenant is dependent on a person's willingness to trust and obey God (= following in the footsteps of Abraham).

"As for me, this is my **covenant** with you: You will be the father of many nations. ... I will establish my **covenant** as an **everlasting covenant** ... The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an **everlasting** possession ..."

... I will establish my **covenant** with [Isaac] as an **everlasting covenant** for his descendants after him.

Genesis 17:4, 7a, 8a, 19b (NIV)

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- Included with this eternal covenant was the sign of circumcision.

Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my **covenant**, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my **covenant** with you and your descendants after you, the **covenant** you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be **the sign of the covenant** between me and you. For the generations to come ..."

Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My **covenant** in your flesh is to be an **everlasting covenant**. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been **circumcised** in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my **covenant**."

Genesis 17:9-12a, 13-14 (NIV)

- In verses 13-14, the sign is described as "circumcision in the *flesh*." It was intended to be a picture of a *spiritual reality* – "cutting" one's self off from the ways of the world – Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4. Circumcision *only* in the flesh has no eternal value – Jeremiah 9:25-26.

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The Davidic Covenant.

- This covenant was made with King David and his offspring. It is found in 2 Samuel 7; and the word "forever" is found in verse 16. However, verses that link the words "forever" and "covenant" are found elsewhere:

SOME OF DAVID'S LAST WORDS:

[God] has established with me an **everlasting covenant**, ordered and secured in every part.
2 Samuel 23:5b (BSB)

KING ABIJAH, DURING WAR WITH THE NORTHERN KINGDOM:

Do you not know that the LORD, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants **forever** by a **covenant** of salt ?
2 Chronicles 13:5 (BSB)

- (We plan to look more at this covenant, at a future time.)

The New Covenant.

- This is the covenant that God said would replace the Mosaic Covenant.
- The Mosaic Covenant showed people what was right. But people needed constantly reminded ("taught") to do what it says, because the *desire to obey* was not embedded within their hearts.
- In contrast, under the New Covenant, God embeds his laws, and the desire to obey them, in the hearts of those under the covenant (as described in Jeremiah 31:31-34).
- This covenant is mentioned frequently by Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel; and they often describe it as "eternal." It is also described as "eternal" in the New Testament (Hebrews 13:20).

I will make a **covenant** of peace with them; it will be an **everlasting covenant**. ... My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.
Ezekiel 37:26a, 27 (NIV)

- (We plan to look more at this covenant, at a future time.)

Covenants Related to the Worship of God.

- **How "forever" are they (considering the meaning of the Hebrew word translated as "forever")?**

- ✓ This group of covenants are related to the Levitical priesthood and some of the activities related to Israel's worship of God. (We might call them "religious activities.")
- ✓ These covenants are described as being "forever"; but their connection with the Mosaic Covenant (which was temporary) has led some people to believe that they have come to an end, or were fulfilled, when the New Covenant was put into effect. These people would remind us that the *Hebrew* word for "forever" or "eternal" *doesn't* always mean "having no endpoint." (We have seen examples that illustrate this.)
- ✓ However, *not everyone agrees with this conclusion*. They agree that the Hebrew word *can* be used in such a way, but they don't believe it is used that way in these passages.

- (We will have to look at this issue next time.)

OUR MISSION!

God has promised us so much! We've only seen part of it; but what we've seen is wonderful!

Let us REJOICE in God's promises!

A key theme in Scripture is that *God can be trusted*. When he makes a promise, we *know* he will keep it.

Let us LIVE by God's promises!

Trust God and obey him. Our willingness to do this is the way we know that we *are* "children of the promise"!

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