

# END-TIMES ISSUES

**#29** "Forever" covenants related to the worship of God.

A  
N  
D  
  
B  
E  
Y  
O  
N  
D  
I

1

### The Old Testament Hebrew concept of "forever/eternal."

(From last week.)

↻ The Hebrew concept referred to the distant time – past or future – and did not always imply "unending." Context will be important in understanding the significance of the word.

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

- Most covenants that are described as "forever" are recognized as never coming to an end. There is no question about them.
- There are a few covenants that are debated, related to: ① the worship of God, and ② the leaders involved. They are found in the books written by Moses and are considered by many to be part of the Mosaic covenant (which was replaced by the New Covenant).

2

### The issue with these possibly-limited covenants:

**The Mosaic Covenant** contained rules and regulations that were to govern Israel.

- They were *external* commands that told people how to live. They were *not* embedded within their hearts. The people had to be *willing* to obey them, or it wouldn't happen. (Most of the people weren't willing.)

**The New Covenant** makes God's laws *internal*. It does not do away with God's laws; but being a *new* covenant, some aspects of the Old Covenant are not a part of it.

- All who are under the New Covenant *desire* to do God's will, though their flesh (the old "sinful nature" that they were born with) fights against it.
- People who do not desire to do God's will are not under this covenant. They may *fake* the obedience, but it is not an expression of love for God and neighbor.

3

### The New Covenant has replaced the Old.

- When God said a "new" covenant was needed (Jeremiah 31:31), this meant that the previous one (the Mosaic Covenant) was becoming obsolete – and in the days of the apostles, it was *fading away*.

**IN JEREMIAH'S DAY.** → When God speaks of a "new" **covenant**, it means he has made the first one obsolete.

**IN THE APOSTLE'S DAY.** → It is now out of date and will soon disappear.

Hebrews 8:13 (NLT)

**QUESTION: When this happened, what came to an end?**

- Just certain parts of the Old Covenant? The whole Law of Moses? Perhaps even the entire Old Testament?
- Whatever one's conclusion, this one thing is definite: *None of this has anything to do with gaining one's salvation!* People who have the New Covenant's "embedded laws and desires" *are already saved*.

4

### Transitioning between the Old and New Covenants:

- Jeremiah 31:31-34 give us a good description of what the New Covenant is. The book of Hebrews explains how Jesus brought the New Covenant to us, replacing the Old Covenant.
  - ✓ The book of **Hebrews** does not say that *all* of the laws ceased to exist. Its focus is on the sacrifices for sin. The sin offerings that were *required* in the Old Testament were no longer needed, because Jesus was the *final* (and permanent) sacrifice.
  - ✓ The **Jeremiah** passage does not say that God's laws would go away, or be cancelled. They would be *embedded* in our hearts, so that we would *desire* to obey. This agrees with what Paul says:

THE SALVATION COMES FIRST!

Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear.

For **God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power** to do what pleases him.

Philippians 2:12-13 (NLT)

5

### Might there be more-than-one issue?

- People may debate about *which* laws are embedded. (Is it just the *moral* law? Or more?)
- We could also debate about whether the situation might be different for Jews vs. Gentiles. (Might Jews have an "embedded desire" to do certain Jewish practices that Gentiles do not need to do?)

**What if we conclude that these "eternal" covenants (which we will be looking at) DO have an ending?**

- **We still have a need to obey God!** The covenants that involve *obligations and conduct* have New Testament counterparts that we have obligations to follow.
- **We still have a need to trust God!** The covenants that are just *statements* about the future (and don't imply obedience), require *trust* in God. He will do what he has planned to do, whether or not we presently understand it. He is in control, and will someday bring order to the mess the world is currently in.

6

### How we will examine these "eternal" covenants (which some believe have come to an end).

1. **Introduce the Scripture passages** – the covenants or concepts that are said to be "eternal."
2. **Note the issues that people tend to debate over.** We won't necessarily come up with an answer. (We would have to examine a wide range of passages, far beyond the scope of this study.)
3. **Explore the significance of these issues in our lives today.** For instance, if these covenants have come to an end, does that mean we have *no obligations* that are similar to them? Or if the covenant doesn't contain commands, how should that affect us?

These passages represent 3 issues, which can be found in *many* old Testament passages – not always with the words "covenant" or "eternal." (We may mention some of the other passages.) Our observations will apply to the entire group of passages that are represented.

7

#1

### Observing the Sabbath.

"The Israelites must keep the **Sabbath** by observing the **Sabbath** throughout their generations as a **perpetual covenant**."

It is a sign between me and the Israelites **forever**; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed. "

Exodus 31:16-17 (NET)

- This is said to be an obligation for the *Israelites*. No mention of Gentiles (at least in this passage).
- Another reason for this command is found in Deuteronomy:

Recall that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there by strength and power. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the **Sabbath** day.

Deuteronomy 5:15 (NET)

8

### ⇒ Some of the issues that people debate over:

- **Why the existence of the Sabbath?** Scripture gives several reasons for the Sabbath, in addition to God "resting" after his work of creating (Genesis 1:1-2:3). As Jesus said, it was made for us, not for God (Mark 2:27). It was for our good!
- **Has the day changed?** Some people claim that the "sabbath" concept was changed to Sunday, after Jesus' resurrection; but there is no direct statement that makes such a claim. It does seem that, in the early church, most Gentile Christians met together on Sundays (but not necessarily the Jews).
- **Has the obligation ended?** Some (perhaps all) of the ceremonial regulations of the Old Covenant no longer need to be followed (though they aren't necessarily forbidden). But there is only *one* passage that might put the Sabbath into this category – and it's a passage written to *Gentiles*. At the same time, it's not a *prohibition*. It's not saying "don't do it," but "don't let people judge you for your choices."

9

- **The potential prohibition in Colossians:**

Therefore do not let anyone judge you with respect to food or drink, or in the matter of a feast, new moon, or **Sabbath days**—these are only the shadow of the things to come, but the reality is Christ!

Colossians 2:16-17 (NET)

- ✓ There is an interpretational problem with this verse. Several "sabbaths" are mentioned in the Old Testament; and there is uncertainty about which are referred to in this passage. But regardless of our conclusion, this much is certain:

The focus of this Colossians passage (and its context) is this: We are not to rely on religious rituals of *any kind* for salvation or spiritual growth, but on Christ alone. We are to rely on Christ 100%, from start to finish, and on *nothing else*.

↪ In other words, what we *need* to know is clear.

10

### ⇒ What if the original covenant has ceased to exist?

- **We still have obligations** under the New Covenant to devote some of our time to God. We have *commands* in Scripture to obey, and the *examples* of the early Christians to learn from.
- **We should want to meet together with other Christians!** If we claim that God's law is now written in our hearts, *how could we not want to give some of our time to God?!* How could we not want to fulfil our greatest obligation to love God more than anything else? How could we not want to get together with other members of the "body of Christ" – to worship God together, and to let God use us to encourage each other, and to build each other up in the Lord?
- **What day of the week?** Most (not all) Christians do this on Sunday – though there is no direct command that it be on that day. In some societies (especially those that strongly oppose Christianity), a Christian may have to pick whatever opportunity he can get, rather than limiting it to one specific day of the week.

11

#2

### Obligations related to the place of worship and to those who minister there.

- ① **The needs of the temple (and the priests).**

Aaron is to tend the lamps continually before the LORD from evening until morning. This is to be a **permanent statute** for the generations to come.

"You are also to take fine flour and bake twelve loaves, ...

Every Sabbath day the bread is to be set out before the LORD on behalf of the Israelites as a **permanent covenant**. It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place; for it is to him a most holy part of the offerings made by fire to the LORD—his portion **forever**."

Leviticus 24:3b, 5a, 8-9 (BSB)

- ✓ This bread provided for the needs of the temple (as one aspect of their worship of God). Later, it would also provide for some of the needs of those who served at the temple.

12

② The needs of the temple workers.

"Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the Lord I give to you and your sons and daughters as your perpetual share. It is an **everlasting covenant** of salt before the Lord for both you and your offspring."

Numbers 18:19 (NIV)

- ✓ This entire chapter has to do with God's provisions for the priests and the Levites. The people were to provide for the priests in various ways.

This may surprise some people: Those who spend their days serving God on our behalf *still* need to eat! They need to provide for their families. They have many of the same expenses that other people have! *Money doesn't drop out of the sky for them... they need us to help them!*

(There are many O.T. instructions related to these issues; though only two verses use *both* words "covenant" and "forever.")

13

⇒ Some of the issues that people debate over:

- **Will there be a future temple?** Obviously, there is no temple at present. But will there be one in the future? The book of Ezekiel (chapters 40-44) gives many details for constructing a temple that – to this day – has *not* been built. It also mentions the presence of Levite priests. If it *does* exist in the future, provisions will be needed for both the temple and the priests who will work there.
- **Some people say "NO!" about the Levites and a future temple.** There are others who treat Ezekiel's temple instructions as figurative language. They deny any future "literal" temple; so there would be no further need for priests... or for providing for them.
- **Do priests do anything besides make sacrifices?** Some argue that, since Jesus has paid the penalty for our sin, there is no further need of sacrifices to atone for sin... so there is no further need for priests. This view seems to overlook the fact that there were *several* types of offerings – including offerings that expressed thanks to God.

14

⇒ What if the original covenant has ceased to exist?

- **We still have obligations** that are similar to those of the Old Testament. God has raised up leaders in the church; and God's people have an *obligation* to provide for their needs. Leaders have a *right* to have their needs provided for (as seen in 1 Corinthians 9:4-14+) – though some, like Paul, may choose to *not* exercise this right.

THE OLD TESTAMENT REGULATIONS ARE THE BASIS FOR THESE RIGHTS!

EVEN THOUGH PAUL CHOSE TO NOT USE HIS RIGHTS!

Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar?

In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

But I have not used any of these rights.

1 Corinthians 9:13-15a (NIV)

15

- **Worship requires personal sacrifice.** Even when it doesn't involve money, it requires time and energy. More than that, it requires us to reject the values we would normally have (even if those values were "religious"), and to devote ourselves to love for God.
- If we have a place where we can come together and worship God *as a group* (and also encourage each other), there will most likely be expenses that *someone* will have to pay!
- Today, many churches have *unnecessary* expenses – things that people may hold dear, but which have little or nothing to do with the church's main purpose, as described in Scripture.
- However, Scripture *does* mention several activities that could potentially cost money... and *someone* would have to pay for them!
  - ✓ Meeting in homes or in public places (including any equipment or supplies that may be a part of it).
  - ✓ The Lord's Table (communion service); taking care of the needy in the church, etc. – i.e., various expressions of love for God and for Christian family.

16

#3

**"Eternal" promises made to the Levitical priests.**

God made several covenants, promises and statutes with the priestly tribe of Levi (and with specific individuals within that group).

Some of these are described as existing "forever"; but what we will be saying would apply to *all* of these passages.

- **Aaron and his sons** have a permanent ("forever") priesthood (described as a "statute," instead of a "covenant").

The priesthood shall be theirs by a **permanent statute.**

Exodus 29:9b (BSB)

- A covenant made with **Levi**, mentioned in Malachi:

"... My **covenant** with Levi ..."

Malachi 2:4b (BSB)

**MORE ABOUT THIS COVENANT:**

17

- ✓ More about God's covenant with **Levi**. (The name "Levi" may be representing the priests who would descend from Levi.)

"My **covenant** with him was one of life and peace, which I gave to him; it called for reverence, and he revered Me and stood in awe of My name.

True instruction was in his mouth, and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity.

For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, because he is the messenger of the LORD of Hosts."

Malachi 2:5-7 (BSB)

The priests in Malachi's day were *not* doing this, so God warned them that he was about to purify them with the refining fire of *judgment*.  
*Their sin would not prevent God from keeping his promise!*

18

- **A permanent ("forever") covenant with Phinehas** (the priest, grandson of Aaron). When the nation of Israel was turning to sexual immorality and the worship of other nations' gods, he was zealous for God's honor. Because of this, God made a permanent ("forever") covenant with him.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned My wrath away from the Israelites; for he was zealous for My sake among them, so that I did not consume the Israelites in My zeal.

Declare, therefore, that I am granting him My **covenant** of peace. It will be a **covenant of permanent** priesthood for him and his descendants, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the Israelites."

Numbers 25:10-13 (BSB)

19

- **Sometimes priests needed disciplined.** Under the *other* covenants, blatant sin would require discipline or punishment. So also here: Sinning priests could face judgment, if they refused to repent.

- ✓ **Nehemiah** had to deal with sinning priests: He expelled them, because:

"... they defiled the priestly office and the **covenant** of the priesthood and of the Levites.

Nehemiah 13:29b (NIV)

- ✓ **In Malachi**, God rebuked them for their sin, and showed them the *right* way to serve at the temple. In Malachi 3:3, God warned them that the time would come when he would purify them with the refining fire of judgment. His goal was:

"... so that My **covenant** with Levi may continue," says the LORD of Hosts.

Malachi 2:4b (BSB)

20

### ↪ **Some of the issues that people debate over:**

- **Did Jesus replace the priests?** Some people limit this "forever" to the Old Testament era. They claim that the Levites have no future role as priests, but that Jesus, the "perfect high priest" has replaced them.
- ✓ The book of Hebrews focuses on Jesus as the great high priest who accomplished something that no Levitical priest could ever accomplish: Eternal forgiveness of sins, and the perfection of those who were forgiven! When it comes to the issue of *salvation*, the Levitical priesthood (and the regulations governing it) – and even the Old Covenant – had to be set aside, replaced by a covenant that *could* accomplish this.

So the former commandment [regarding Levitical priests] is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

... Jesus has become the guarantee of a better **covenant**.

Heb 7:18-19, 22b (BSB)

21

- **Doesn't Scripture mention priests as existing both *now* and in the *future*?** What Jesus did is important; but does that mean there is no further need (or purpose) for *other* priests?

- ✓ Others may reply: Scripture says there will be *many* priests – even among the Gentiles – and none of these will be doing what Jesus did. *So why argue against Levitical priests?* Perhaps their function would change; but that's not an argument against their existence!

"... you [Jesus] were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God **persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.**

**You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."**

Revelation 5:9-10 (NIV)

22

- **Ezekiel mentions priests in an apparently-future temple.** He gives us many details about a temple that has never existed (so far), including its measurements (Ezekiel 40-44). In the same passages, he says much about *priests* ministering at that temple.

- ✓ However, he also mentions burnt offerings and sin offerings – which raises the question... "Why would they be needed?"

There [in the priests' rooms] they will put the most holy offerings—the grain offerings, **the sin offerings and the guilt offerings**—for the place is holy.

Ezekiel 42:13b (NIV)

- ✓ Because of this, some view this temple as figurative language. Others say that the sacrifices have a different significance. (After all, sacrifices *never* took away sins – Hebrews 10:4!)
- ✓ It can also be noted that Paul was willing to participate in purification rites that required *sacrifices*, when the time was ended (Acts 21:20-26). [Some apostate Jews took the opportunity to falsely accuse him (v. 27+).]

23

- **Could Jesus' priesthood and the Levites' priesthoods be two separate issues?** The book of Hebrews very emphatically states that Jesus is after the order of *Melchizedek*, not Levi. And the Old Testament covenants were given specifically to the *Levites*, not to the order of Melchizedek!

**PRIESTS UNDER THE LAW: FROM THE TRIBE OF LEVI, NOT JUDAH.**

Now the law requires **the descendants of Levi** who become priests to [do various things] ...

... it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

Hebrews 7:5a, 14 (NIV)

**JESUS (FROM THE TRIBE OF JUDAH) AS A PRIEST.**

[Jesus] has become a high priest forever **in the order of Melchizedek.**

Hebrews 6:20b (NIV)

24

- It's as permanent as the Davidic Covenant! Jeremiah places the Levitic Covenant on the same level as the Davidic Covenant... and says that *both* are permanent – not that one is permanent and one is figurative!

"For this is what the LORD says: **David will never lack a man** to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, **nor will the priests** who are Levites ever fail to have a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to present sacrifices."

"This is what the LORD says: If you can break My **covenant** with the day and My **covenant** with the night, so that day and night cease to occupy their appointed time, then **My covenant** may also be broken **with David My servant and with My ministers the Levites** who are priests, so that David will not have a son to reign on his throne.

As the hosts of heaven cannot be counted and as the sand on the seashore cannot be measured, **so too will I multiply the descendants of My servant David and the Levites** who minister before Me."

Jeremiah 33:17-18, 20-22 (BSB)

25

### ➤ What if we conclude that these covenants with the Levites have ceased to exist?

- This is a matter where our opinion (right or wrong) will not change what God plans to do in the future (whatever it may be).
- Our job is to *trust* God – whether or not he does what we expect – and to *obey* him in what he tells us to do.
- We should also be willing consider the possibility that he might accomplish *more than* what we expect, whatever our expectations may be. (He did that with his *first* coming... he can do it again!)

**We should be excited,**  
as we look forward to seeing what God does  
in the future!  
**There may be a lot of surprises!**

26

### What can we conclude?

- ✓ If we *trust* God, it's OK if we don't know the answers to these questions!
- ✓ If Jesus' *first* coming is any indication of what to expect in the future, there will probably be surprises that display God's glory and power in ways we don't expect.
- ✓ One of the purposes of prophecy is to enable us to *look back after* it has been fulfilled, and marvel at God's power to accomplish all the different things that were revealed in Scripture – some of which may seem contradictory at the present time. (That would be no different than at his *first* coming.)
- ✓ Another purpose is for us to be encouraged *now*. God has told us he has great plans for the future. Everything is under control – even when the present situation does not look good. *We don't have to worry about the final outcome.*

27

## Our MISSION? "Realize!"

>> THESE 3 THINGS <<

1. First, these are not matters that will hinder or prevent salvation.
2. It can be a wonderful opportunity to remind ourselves that we don't know everything!
3. Regarding the future, we can consider the possibility that God hasn't revealed everything that's going to happen. *But he has revealed what we need to know.* This fact hasn't changed since Moses said these words to the people of Israel!

The **secret things** belong to the Lord our God, but the **things revealed** belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

Deuteronomy 29:29 (NIV)

28

★ **What we NEED to know is CLEAR.** ★  
★ **What is OPTIONAL is not always clear.** ★

### Our natural tendency is:

What is CLEAR and needed...  
we tend to muddle it up.

What is less clear and OPTIONAL...  
we tend to preoccupy ourselves with it.

★ **WE NEED TO FIGHT THIS TENDENCY!** ★

29

## Credits

### SCRIPTURE

- Scriptures marked "NLT" – Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.
- Scriptures marked "NIV" - Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. (www.biblica.com )
- Scriptures marked "NET" - The Scriptures quoted are from the NET Bible® <https://netbible.com> copyright ©1996, 2019 used with permission from Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. All rights reserved.
- Scriptures marked "BSB" – Taken from The Holy Bible, Berean Standard Bible, BSB, Public Domain (CC BY NC ND), <https://bereanbible.com/>

### PICTURES (original sources; modifications may have been made)

- Brick wall – GDJ / GCO; via [openclipart.org](https://openclipart.org/detail/227630/brick-texture); <https://openclipart.org/detail/227630/brick-texture>
- Globe with lit fuse – GDJ / GCO; via [openclipart.org](https://openclipart.org/detail/219655/political-map-easth-globe-bomb); <https://openclipart.org/detail/219655/political-map-easth-globe-bomb>

Presentation – Dennis Hinks © 2024.

30