

END-TIMES ISSUES



#30 Covenants and God's eternal plan for us.

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1

In the beginning... **GOD CREATED!**

He did it for a **PURPOSE...**
and **THAT PURPOSE WILL NOT BE THWARTED!**

GOD CREATED!

... **the WORLD**, as a reflection of his glory and goodness.

... **PEOPLE**, as his "image-bearers" – to rule over the world in God's behalf.

- They were to work with creation in a way that increasingly revealed God's glory and goodness in creation. In doing this, it would result in increased blessings for the people themselves.

2

What could go wrong?

➤ What if the humans chose to NOT do this?

- ✓ It would be a rejection of God's glory and goodness – and all that goes along with such a rejection. This is "**sin**."
- ✓ It would result in hostility, alienation and separation from God – and all the other consequences that God calls "**death**."

DEATH – NOT "ceasing to exist," but:

- ❖ "SEPARATION" from all that is good, and experiencing the fury of the wrath of God – wrath that *must necessarily exist* in the presence of evil.
- ❖ When people choose evil over God's goodness, *it is a rejection of all that God is*.

3

➤ The human race *did* choose the path of death.

- ✓ **Our first ancestors** – Adam and Eve – chose to sin.
- ✓ **Every human*** *since that time* has reaffirmed our first ancestor's choice by their own choices.

➤ This choice had consequences.

- ✓ It is **now our nature to sin** – and thus, to be under the wrath of God. This originally included those who are *now* saved:

Like the rest, we were **by nature children of wrath**.

Ephesians 2:3b (BSB)

People often ask why "bad" things happen to "good" people.

But since we have rejected the *source* of good, we should be asking why "good" things happen at all. *It is only because God has plans to accomplish, that he has delayed the final judgment.*

* (To whatever extent they have the conscious ability to make choices.)

4

The horrible consequences of sin.

➤ Our thinking on moral issues is now distorted.

- ✓ **Sin** now looks *less* sinful and *more* desirable. (We may even compare ourselves to "worse sinners," to make our own actions look "better"!)
- ✓ **Righteousness** appears *less* desirable, perhaps even counterproductive (unless we can use it for attaining our own personal goals).

➤ The ultimate consequences are devastating.

- ✓ **For us:** We are under the wrath of God. We *should* have been destroyed at the moment of our *first* sin. Justice *undelayed* would have meant the *immediate* wrath of God.
- ✓ **For creation:** Ultimately, it results in the *ruin* of God's good creation – which we were originally instructed to use and develop for the glory of God.

5

Even so, God's purpose will NOT be thwarted!

Nothing the human race does can oppose God's purpose, *and succeed*.

Scripture has revealed some his plans to us!

In Scripture:

- We learn the "**basics**" about God's purpose: How it has developed in the *past*, and where it's going in the *future*.
- But we **don't know everything**: God sees the whole picture; but we only know the basic outline. We might be able to see the *general flow* of history toward that goal; but not all the details of getting us there.
- **What we can conclude:** The small (day-to-day) details may look very confusing at the present time. Many things in our lives *don't* make sense... and they *won't*, until we reach the end-point – the time when God's plans are finally accomplished.

6

HOW should we respond?

God has promised that the final goal *will* be reached.

"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, **'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'**"

Isaiah 46:10 (NIV)

We are to trust him, because he is the *faithful* God (Deuteronomy 7:9). Those who trust him can say with confidence:

In Him 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)

And we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, who are **called according to His purpose.**

Romans 8:28 (BSB)

7

What about evil?

It exists, because we, the human race, have chosen to make it exist.

The issue of "quality" vs. "quantity."

We tend to look at the *quantity* of evil in something, and say that some people's evil is greater than the evil of others.

If we were to look at the *quality* of evil, we would discover that it *all* falls into the same category: *It is all against the holy and righteous Creator God.* Compared to his holiness, the differences between "big" and "little" expressions of evil may exist. But the differences aren't really that great.

The Day of Judgment and Justice will come. Those who refuse to repent of evil (regardless of its "size") will reap disaster.

The Lord works out everything to its proper end— even **the wicked for a day of disaster.**

Proverbs 16:4 (NIV)

8

People choose to do evil; yet God will use it to accomplish his purposes. [EXAMPLE: Assyria].

Evil people will be doing evil for their own evil reasons. They *won't* be doing it to honor God. Even so, *God* may use that evil to accomplish good. For example, God used an evil nation (Assyria) to punish Northern Israel:

"Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath!

I send him against a godless nation,
I dispatch him against a people who anger me,
to seize loot and snatch plunder,
and to trample them down like mud in the streets."

Isaiah 10:5-6 (NIV)

The Assyrians were doing this for *evil* reasons, not because they wanted to honor God. So in the end, their own judgment can be described by the word "woe" (v. 5).

9

As far as the Assyrians were concerned, the God of the Bible had nothing to do with it. Assyria's goal was self-exaltation. Because of this, their own judgment would eventually come.

"But this is not what he intends,
this is not what he has in mind;
his purpose is to destroy,
to put an end to many nations. ...

For he says:
"By the strength of my hand I have done this,
and **by my wisdom,** because I have understanding.
I removed the boundaries of nations,
I plundered their treasures;
like a mighty one I subdued their kings.

Isaiah 10:7, 13 (NIV)

Consider Nineveh (a city in Assyria): Judgment was delayed, when they repented at the preaching of Jonah. But when they went back to their sin, they were destroyed. (See the book of Nahum.)

10

God would judge Assyria... not because God used them to punish Israel, but because of *their own sins*.

When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say, "I will punish the king of Assyria for the **willful pride** of his heart and the **haughty look** in his eyes."

Isaiah 10:12 (NIV)

What about the righteous? [The prophet Habakkuk answers this.]

God used wicked Babylon to judge Judah (Habakkuk 1). In chapter 2, we learn that *the righteous will continue to trust God.* (Note the contrast between the *righteous* and the *proud*.) See also chapter 3, Habakkuk's expression of faith in the midst of judgment.

Look at the proud one; his soul is not upright —
but **the righteous will live by faith ...**

Habakkuk 2:4 (BSB)

11

What about random evil – when nobody seems to be doing anything wrong, and it still occurs?

The book of Proverbs shows us what *typically* occurs when people choose the *wise* way of living. But even then, people may randomly experience misfortune, *just because they live in a world that is influenced by sin.*

"TIME AND CHANCE"
SOMETIMES
INTERFERES
WITH THE
THINGS WE
WOULD
NORMALLY
EXPECT TO
HAPPEN.

I saw something else under the sun:
The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong;
neither is the bread to the wise, nor the wealth to the intelligent, nor the favor to the skillful.
For time and chance happen to all.

For surely no man knows his time: Like fish caught in a cruel net or birds trapped in a snare, so men are ensnared in **an evil time that suddenly falls upon them.**

Ecclesiastes 9:11-12 (BSB)

12

**What about *ongoing* evil?
How should the righteous respond to it?**

In a sinful world, this often happens. There are many Scripture passages that focus on this type of situation.

- We can learn from the **book of Job**.
- Many **Psalms** focus on the experience of evil *and* the need to rely on God in such situations. Psalm 73 is about someone who almost gave up in discouragement.

My flesh and my heart may fail,
but **God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.**

Psalm 73:26 (NIV)

- The **New Testament** also teaches us a lot about this issue.
- **Jesus** himself gives us a pattern to follow.

13

The day is coming when *all* sin and injustice will be dealt with, and righteousness will prevail... *forever*.

✦ **God's original plan will NOT be thwarted!** ✦

There will be a *fire judgment* – called the "Day of God" – that will result in a *new* heaven and earth... where righteousness will prevail forever.

... the coming of the day of God, when the heavens will be **destroyed by fire** and the elements will **melt in the heat**.

But in keeping with **God's promise**, we are looking forward to **a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.**

2 Peter 3:12b-13 (BSB)

There is only *one* question left to consider...

14

What is YOUR response to God's promise?

This is where human responsibility comes into the picture. The response you *choose* will determine whether you experience the *wrath* you *deserve*, or the *life* you *don't* deserve.

You are *choosing* how you are going to respond; so you won't be able to blame God, if you choose to remain unrepentant.

But remember this: **The day of God's patience will someday come to a close.**

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead **he is patient with you**, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:8-9 (NIV)

15

This "age (era) of sin" will come to a close.

In the past, God, by the power of his Word, created the heavens and the earth, and judged the world.

A future day is coming, when this same word will powerfully judge all things ... and all people.

By the same word the present heavens and earth are **reserved for fire**, being kept for **the day of judgment and destruction** of the ungodly. ...

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will **disappear with a roar**; the elements will be **destroyed by fire**, and the earth and everything done in it will be **laid bare**. ... That day will bring about the **destruction** of the heavens by **fire**, and the elements will **melt** in the heat.

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to **a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.**

2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12b-13 (NIV)

16

God's purpose for creation will be accomplished.

God's people have a wonderful future... a future that starts *now!*

Don't wait for the *future* to start pursuing righteousness! (A changed heart will make a person *want* to pursue it *now!*)

Since everything will be destroyed in this way [see previous verses], what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live **holy and godly lives** as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found **spotless, blameless and at peace with him**.

Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, **be on your guard** so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But **grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 3:11-12a, 14, 17-18a (NIV)

17

**So what does all this
have to do with covenants?**

God's covenants embody his plans to get from the original perfect creation (which we destroyed) to its final perfect goal.

God has revealed these covenants to us, so that we can have a confident hope for the future that is based on a firm foundation.

- Even creation itself has this hope!

Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But **with eager hope**, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.

Romans 8:20-21 (NLT)

18

GOD CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH... WITH GOOD PLANS.

- ✓ Glory to God.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.
Genesis 1:31a (NIV)

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Psalm 19:1 (NIV)
- ✓ Blessings and glory for humans.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule..."
Genesis 1:26a (NIV)

You crowned mankind with honor and majesty. you appoint them to rule over your creation; you have placed everything under their authority, ...
Psalm 8:5b-6 (NET)

✦ This is the beginning of a *good* day! ➔ **HUMANS HAVE A GLORIOUS ROLE: RULING OVER CREATION FOR GOD.**

19

THE HUMANS REBEL... SIN ENTERS THE WORLD AND DESTROYS IT.

- ✓ Sin corrupts the human race.
- ✓ Human loyalty now belongs to the serpent [⇒ the spiritual force that controlled the physical snake].
- ✓ Sin *cannot* remain in God's presence; so the humans must be given over to a condition called "death."

The Serpent [⇒ the spiritual force]* probably thought he had victory over God. The presence of sin has forever destroyed God's glorious plans for creation.

✦ **God does something unexpected:** He does *not* pour out the full wrath of his justice. *Spiritual* death has occurred; but *physical* death is delayed.

➔ **GOD PROMISES THAT SOMEDAY THE SERPENT WILL BE "CRUSHED."**

"... he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."
Genesis 3:15b (NIV)

* When we use the word "serpent," we will be referring to the Spiritual force who empowered the snake (also called the Devil, etc.).

20

A WORLD OF HUMANS UNITES IN REBELLION AGAINST GOD. GOD DESTROYS THE WORLD WITH A FLOOD.

- ✓ It is very quickly demonstrated that there are two types of offspring among Adam and Eve's children: those who trust God and those who are in rebellion against God.
- ✓ Through spiritual and moral compromise, those in rebellion win out... until there is only *one* God-fearing human left.

Again, the Serpent probably thought he had victory over God...

✦ **God does something unexpected:** He *destroys* all of humanity, except for that one righteous person and his family.

➔ **GOD MAKES A COVENANT WITH NOAH: HE WILL NOT FLOOD THE EARTH AGAIN.**

"I establish my **covenant** with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."
Genesis 9:11 (NIV)

21

ONCE AGAIN, A WORLD OF HUMANS UNITES IN REBELLION AGAINST GOD.

- ✓ God has already acknowledged the complete corruption of human nature. *Yet because of his promise to Noah, he can't destroy them – which they deserve.*

"...every inclination of the human heart is **evil from childhood.**"
Genesis 8:21b (NIV)

Again, the Serpent probably thought he had victory over God...

✦ **God does something unexpected:** He destroys their ability to *communicate* with each other.

➔ **GOD SCATTERS THE HUMAN RACE, SO THEY CANNOT UNITE IN REBELLION.**

... the Lord confused the language of the whole world. ... the Lord **scattered** them over the face of the whole earth.
Genesis 11:9b (NIV)

22

IT SEEMS AS THOUGH GOD'S PLANS HAVE FAILED.

- ✓ Though the people can't *unite* in rebellion, there does not appear to be *any* God-fearing people left... except maybe *one*.

Again, the Serpent probably thought he had victory over God...

✦ **God does something unexpected:** He tells that one man to leave *everything* and follow him... *and the man trusts God and obeys.*

➔ **GOD MAKES A COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM, PROMISING HIM MANY DESCENDANTS, A LAND, AND BLESSINGS TO THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE.**

"You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him from Ur of the Chaldeans and renamed him Abraham. When he had proved himself faithful, you made a **covenant** with him ..."
Nehemiah 9:7-8a (NLT)

23

NOW IT'S TIME FOR GOD TO BEGIN KEEPING HIS PROMISE TO ABRAHAM.

- ✓ God has shifted his focus. He has let the nations go their way, living in sin and rebellion against him. He will create his own nation.

Now, the Serpent has to change his focus. All is not lost. He already "owns" the rest of the human race, and how has to focus on just one group of people. And besides, they are still sinners.

- ✓ There will be plenty of opportunities to thwart God's plan. God can make all the promises he wants... but as long as people are *still* sinners, his plan for creation *cannot* be fulfilled!

✦ **God does something unexpected:** Everything he does seems to fail. Each time things look promising, the people turn back to rebellion.

➔ **IN ALL THIS, GOD KEEPS MAKING PROMISES AND ACTING AS THOUGH THE VICTORY IS HIS!**

24

THE PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW HOW TO LIVE.

- ✓ To keep his promise, God needs a *nation* of people, a *land* for them to live in; and they need the *knowledge* of how God-honoring people are to live. At this point in time, God has none of these.
- ✓ He delivers the Hebrew slaves out of the land of Egypt, only for them to become trapped between the Egyptian army and the sea.

Again, the Serpent probably thought he had victory over God. Soon, the Hebrews would all be dead.

✦ **God does something unexpected:** He delivers Israel *through* the sea, and destroys the army of Egypt. ➔ **AS THE NATION TRAVELS TOWARD THE PROMISED LAND, GOD GIVES THEM THE KNOWLEDGE THAT WILL SHOW THEM HOW TO LIVE: A COVENANT, GIVEN THROUGH MOSES.**

25

MORE NEEDS.

- ✓ The people need a godly king, who will lead them in the ways of God. He gives them David to be their king. ➔ **GOD MAKES A COVENANT WITH DAVID, AND PROMISES THAT HIS OFFSPRING WILL RULE OVER ISRAEL FOREVER.**
- ✓ The result? In the years after David, there ends up being *twice* as many problems! Now, both the *people* and the *king* rebel against God!

Again, the Serpent may have thought he would soon have the victory. God is obviously not succeeding!

✦ **God does something unexpected:** He promises to change the people's *hearts*, so that they will stop wanting to sin! ➔ **GOD PROMISES THEM A NEW COVENANT THAT WILL ACCOMPLISH THESE THINGS.**

26

THERE IS STILL A MAJOR PROBLEM!

- ✓ God can talk all he wants about a "new covenant," but the fact of the matter is that the Jews – and all of the world – are *still* sinners... and sin needs *punished!*

Again, the Serpent probably thought he had victory, at least a permanent "stalemate" – since all these "sin issues" remain unresolved!

✦ **God does something unexpected:** He sends Jesus, who lives a *sinless* life. And ... ➔ **SINLESS JESUS GETS PUNISHED FOR OUR SIN.**

Well, the Serpent couldn't get Jesus to sin... but he *did* get him to die! So perhaps he still could claim victory!

✦ **God does something unexpected:** Because Jesus was sinless, something could occur, that could *not* occur with anyone else in creation ... ➔ **GOD RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD. IN DOING THIS, THE SERPENT HAS NOW BEEN "CRUSHED."**

27

GOD'S PROMISES AND GOALS FOR CREATION CAN NOW BE FULLY ACCOMPLISHED!

- ✓ There is more to come. All the covenants point toward this final conclusion..And now the conclusion is *guaranteed!*

Even now, the Serpent *knows* that he has *lost* completely! It's just a matter of time. *But he plans to fight as long as he can.*

- ✓ Jesus will rule over all nations, as King of kings and Lord of lords. Creation will be restored to something even better than before.
- ✓ The Serpent and all who are on his side will be cast out of God's presence, and will experience the righteous wrath of God forever.

✦ **All along, God has done the unexpected.** He has a *plan*; there *is* meaning to all that exists. There is a goal, and a future for all who love, trust and obey him! ➔ **THIS LEAVES US WITH OUR MISSION!**

28

So the Lord God said to **the serpent**, ... "Cursed are you ...
... he [= the woman's offspring] will **crush** your head,
and you will strike his heel."
Genesis 3:14a, 15b (NIV)

OUR MISSION!

- ✓ **Rejoice** in the work of God, *and in his wonderful surprises!*
- ✓ **Live** with the knowledge that life has a purpose... and we have a glorious future to look forward to, *without* the serpent!

The great dragon was hurled down – **that ancient serpent** called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. ...
And the devil ... was **thrown** into the lake of burning sulfur...
[He] will be **tormented** day and night for ever and ever.
Revelation 12:9a; 20:10 (NIV)

29

**Every "victory" by Satan is going to be turned into a defeat!
Don't choose to be on the side of the loser!**

Credits

SCRIPTURE

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