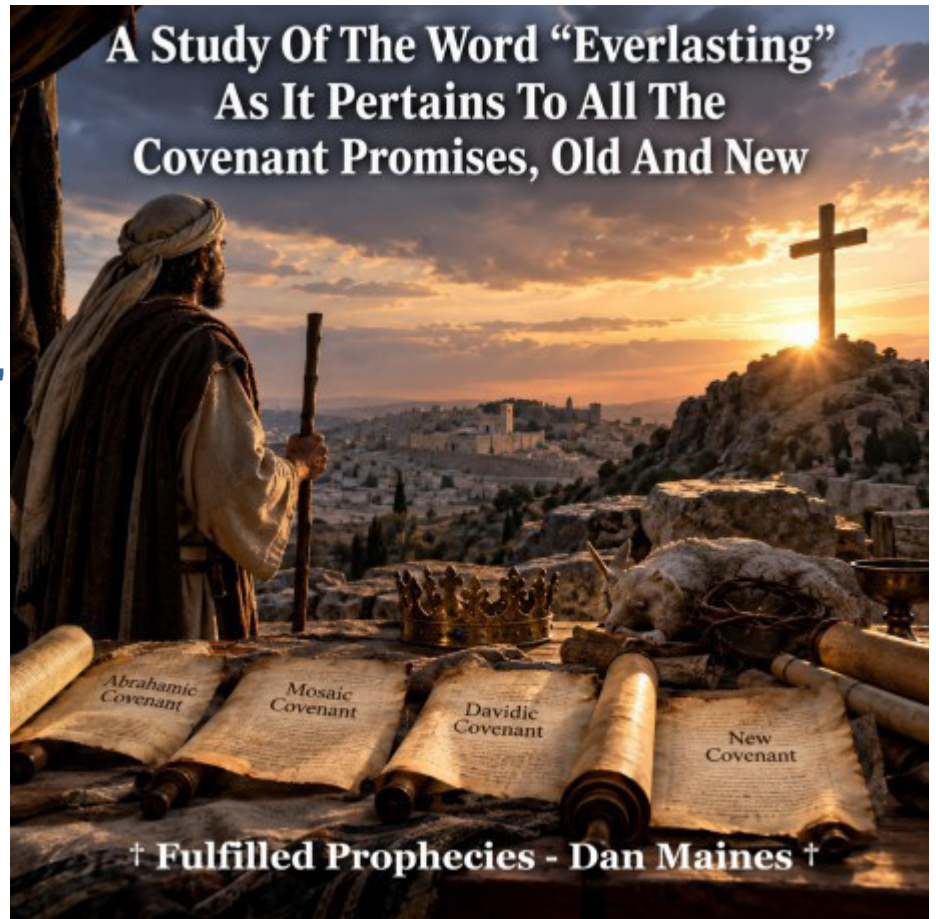


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A Study Of The Word "Everlasting" As It Pertains To All The Covenant Promises, Old And New



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† The word "everlasting" appears throughout Scripture in connection with covenants, promises, statutes, priesthood, possession, salvation, and God's kingdom. The important question isn't whether the word means something significant and enduring, but how Scripture itself shows us what is everlasting and how those promises reach their intended fulfillment. (The everlasting purpose remained while the

temporary covenant arrangement lasted.)

† We can't assume that every covenant arrangement called "everlasting" was intended to continue forever in exactly the same outward form. Scripture calls circumcision an everlasting covenant, the Sabbath an everlasting covenant, and the Levitical priesthood an everlasting priesthood, yet the New Testament clearly teaches that these covenant signs and institutions reached their fulfillment in Christ (Galatians 5:6; Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 7:11-12).

† The everlasting purpose of God didn't fail when the old covenant passed away. The old covenant was moving toward its promised goal. What was temporary gave way to what it pictured, and what God promised found its fulfillment in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20; Hebrews 8:6-13).

Genesis 17:7

I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.

† God called His covenant with Abraham an everlasting covenant. Yet Paul explains that the promised Seed ultimately points to Christ, not simply to an endless succession of physical descendants (Galatians 3:16).

† The Abrahamic promise didn't fail when the old covenant age ended. It reached its intended fulfillment in Christ, and those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed according to promise (Galatians 3:26-29).

† This shows us an important biblical principle. "Everlasting" doesn't require every outward covenant form associated with a promise to continue unchanged forever. God's everlasting purpose continues through the fulfillment of His promise.

Genesis 17:13

A slave who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall certainly be circumcised; so My covenant shall be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant.

† Physical circumcision was specifically called an everlasting covenant. Yet the apostles didn't require Gentile believers to receive physical circumcision (Acts 15:1-29).

† Paul said that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything in Christ, but faith working through love is what matters (Galatians 5:6). He also described the true circumcision in terms that aren't dependent upon physical circumcision (Philippians 3:3).

† If "everlasting" always meant that the outward covenant ordinance could never reach fulfillment or cease to be binding, physical circumcision would still be required of every believer. The New Testament shows that this isn't how covenant language works.

Exodus 31:16-17

So the sons of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a permanent covenant. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed.

† The Sabbath was a covenant sign specifically given between God and the children of Israel. It was described as a perpetual covenant and a sign "for ever."

† Yet Paul told believers not to allow anyone to judge them concerning a Sabbath day because these things were a shadow, while the substance belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:16-17).

† Hebrews takes the Sabbath theme beyond the weekly covenant sign and points to God's greater rest (Hebrews 4:1-11). The shadow served its covenant purpose, but the reality to which it pointed is greater than the sign.

Exodus 40:15

and you shall anoint them just as you have anointed their father, so that they may serve as priests to Me; and their anointing will qualify them for a permanent priesthood throughout their generations.

† Aaron's descendants were given what Scripture calls an everlasting priesthood. Yet Hebrews explicitly teaches that a change of priesthood required a change of law (Hebrews 7:11-12).

† Jesus didn't become a priest according to the Levitical order. His priesthood is according to the order of Melchizedek, and because He continues forever, His priesthood doesn't pass to another (Hebrews 7:17, 23-25).

† The Levitical priesthood therefore couldn't have meant an institution that would operate without end in its original form. Its purpose was fulfilled when the greater and permanent priesthood of Christ was established.

Jeremiah 31:31-33

"Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord: I will put My law within them and write it on their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

† Jeremiah didn't predict the endless continuation of the Mosaic covenant. He predicted a new covenant that would specifically be "not according to" the covenant God made when Israel came out of Egypt.

† Hebrews quotes this prophecy and explains that by calling it a new covenant, God made the first covenant old, and what was becoming old and growing aged was near to disappearing (Hebrews 8:6-13).

† This is decisive. An old covenant containing ordinances described with everlasting language could reach its appointed end without God's promises failing. The promises were being fulfilled through the better covenant established in Christ.

Jeremiah 32:40

I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts, so that they will not turn away from Me.

† Jeremiah moves from the covenant that would become old to the promise of an everlasting covenant. God's purpose wasn't to leave His people permanently under the Mosaic administration, but to bring them into something better.

† The new covenant changes the emphasis from external covenant regulations to God's work within His people (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26-27).

† The everlasting promise finds its strength in God's faithfulness. The new covenant isn't another temporary shadow waiting for a greater covenant to replace it.

Isaiah 55:3

Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David.

† Isaiah connected the everlasting covenant with the sure mercies promised to David. The New Testament applies this promise directly to the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 13:32-34).

† This means the everlasting Davidic promise isn't waiting for the restoration of an earthly throne in national Israel. The apostles proclaimed its fulfillment in the risen Christ (Acts 2:29-36).

† Jesus possesses the promised kingdom and reigns as the promised Son of David. The everlasting character of the promise is secured in Him.

Ezekiel 37:26-27

And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be among them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.

† Ezekiel's everlasting covenant includes God's sanctuary and

His dwelling among His people. Revelation uses this same covenant language when describing God's dwelling with His people (Revelation 21:2-3).

† The New Testament identifies God's people themselves as His temple and dwelling place through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5).

† The promise therefore moves beyond a physical sanctuary. God's everlasting dwelling is with His covenant people in Christ.

Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, that is, Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

† Hebrews brings the covenant story directly to Jesus and calls His covenant an eternal covenant. The blood of Christ established what the blood of bulls and goats could never accomplish permanently (Hebrews 9:11-15; 10:1-14).

† The old covenant had sacrifices, priests, a sanctuary, and regulations that repeatedly pointed forward. Christ brought the reality those shadows anticipated.

† The everlasting covenant isn't the endless continuation of the Mosaic covenant. It's the completed covenant work established through Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:20

For as many as the promises of God are, in Him they are yes; therefore through Him also is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

† Paul gives us the key for understanding God's covenant promises. Their answer is found in Christ.

† God's promises don't require the endless survival of every old covenant shadow. Their faithfulness is demonstrated by their fulfillment in the One to whom they pointed (Galatians 3:16; Colossians 2:16-17).

† The old covenant wasn't God's final destination. Christ is the fulfillment toward which the promises were moving.

Historical References

† Josephus described circumcision, the Sabbath, sacrifices, the priesthood, and the temple as central institutions of the Jewish nation. His writings provide historical evidence of how deeply these covenant practices were connected with Israel and the temple system before its destruction in AD 70.

† Josephus recorded the destruction of the temple and the collapse of its sacrificial system in AD 70 in *Wars of the Jews*, Book 6. The historical end of temple sacrifice agrees with the New Testament's theological argument that the old covenant system was becoming obsolete and was near to disappearing (Hebrews 8:13).

† Eusebius later argued in *Demonstratio Evangelica* that the promises concerning Christ extended beyond the old national and ceremonial arrangement and were being realized among the nations through Christ.

† These historical writers don't establish the meaning of Scripture. Scripture interprets Scripture, but history confirms that the old temple, priesthood, and sacrificial order didn't continue after AD 70.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't need to return to physical circumcision, Levitical priests, animal sacrifices, an earthly sanctuary, or old covenant Sabbath regulations to receive God's everlasting promises.

† We have something better. We've come to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24).

† God's covenant promises didn't fail. They reached their goal in Christ.

† The shadows weren't everlasting because the shadows themselves had to remain forever. God's covenant purpose was everlasting because what He promised was brought to its intended reality in Christ.

† This protects us from rebuilding what Christ fulfilled. We don't look backward for another old covenant age, and we don't look forward for God to restart a covenant system that Scripture says became obsolete.

† We live under the everlasting covenant established through the blood of Christ. His kingdom remains, His priesthood remains, His salvation remains, and His presence with His people remains (Hebrews 7:24-25; 12:28).

† The Bible's covenant story moves from promise to fulfillment, from shadow to reality, from the temporary administration to the everlasting kingdom of Christ.

Q & A Appendix

Q: If the Bible called circumcision an everlasting covenant, why aren't Christians required to be circumcised?

A: Because the New Testament explains how the promise reached its fulfillment in Christ. Physical circumcision isn't the basis of membership in God's new covenant people (Galatians 5:6; 6:15; Philippians 3:3).

Q: If the Sabbath was called a perpetual covenant and a sign forever, why isn't the old covenant Sabbath still binding?

A: Because it was specifically a covenant sign between God and Israel, and Paul identifies Sabbath observance as a shadow whose substance is Christ (Exodus 31:16-17; Colossians 2:16-17).

Q: If the Aaronic priesthood was called everlasting, how could it end?

A: Hebrews says plainly that the priesthood changed, and with that change came a change of law. Christ's superior priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek is permanent (Hebrews 7:11-12, 17, 23-25).

Q: Does this mean God's everlasting promises failed?

A: No. Their fulfillment proves God's faithfulness. All the

promises of God find their "Yes" in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Q: What is the everlasting covenant for believers today?

A: Hebrews identifies the covenant established through the blood of Jesus as the eternal covenant (Hebrews 13:20-21). It's the new covenant promised by the prophets and established through Christ.

Q: Are we waiting for the old covenant promises to be restarted in the future?

A: No. The New Testament directs believers to Christ as the fulfillment of God's promises and says we've already come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Q: What does "everlasting" teach us when we're studying covenant promises?

A: We must allow the whole Bible to define the covenant context. Something described with everlasting language can have an enduring divine purpose while its temporary outward form reaches fulfillment. Circumcision, Sabbath observance, and the Levitical priesthood demonstrate this clearly (Genesis 17:13; Exodus 31:16-17; Exodus 40:15; Hebrews 7:11-12).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Genesis 17:7, 13; Exodus 31:16-17; Exodus 40:15; Jeremiah 31:31-33; Jeremiah 32:40; Isaiah 55:3; Ezekiel 37:26-27; Hebrews 13:20-21; 2 Corinthians 1:20

† Historical writers: Flavius Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 6; Eusebius, Demonstratio Evangelica

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