

THE PROMISES OF GOD- 2 Corinthians 1:20

The Bible is a book of hope and it contains -according to the well-known evangelical scholar Herbert Lockyer, around 8000 promises- in fact, Lockyer wrote a book called "All the Promises of the Bible." God is supremely the God who fulfils the promises which he has made:

"No matter how many promises God has made, they are YES in Christ."

All the promises which God made to the people of Israel are fulfilled in Jesus He is the grand culmination of all that God has promised.

WHAT IS A PROMISE?

Oddly, there is no word in Hebrew which means a promise- the Hebrew word simply means that somebody spoke something with a future reference (the word is *dabar*).

A promise is normally an assurance of a continuing or future action on behalf of someone. It is typical of humans that we make promises and these are often broken: Peter promised Jesus that he would never deny him yet he had done so three times before the cock crowed! Politicians are notorious for making promises during election campaigns which they are either unwilling or unable to keep (remember Harold Wilson and devaluation or Gordon Brown and David Cameron and their promised referenda on the Lisbon Treaty??!!). Humans are imperfect and sinful and they let us down - remember the tree in the Garden of Eden which Adam and Eve promised not to eat from? However, when God promises, we can rely upon Him because He is wholly trustworthy and completely reliable:

2 Peter 1:4: "He has given us his very great and precious promises..."

Numbers 23:19 firmly grounds the trustworthiness of God's promises in His character:

" God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that he should change His mind Does He speak and not act? Does he promise and not fulfil?"

Joshua 21:14 makes it plain that the promises which God had given to the people of Israel concerning the occupation of the land were all fulfilled:

" Not one of all the good promises the Lord God gave you has failed!" This is repeated once again in verse 45 to reinforce the point.

GOD'S PROMISES

Whereas human promises are often broken, God's promises contain hope for the future- the world can offer little hope- its hopes are short-lived and transient but the hope which is embodied in Christ is sure and certain- "We have been born anew to a living hope"... 1 Peter 1:3 however, we also look forward to the "blessed hope," Titus 2:13- that is the return of Christ. Abraham, who was promised by God that he would be the Father of many nations (Genesis 15:5) was particularly blessed by God because he seized hold of the hope which was contained in the promise - "In hope, he believed against hope that he should be the Father of many nations..." Abraham was able to lay hold of God's promises through faith and though he was a hundred years old, he grew strong in faith as he gave glory to God."

In the example of Abraham, we see a man whose heart was powerfully impacted by the Holy Spirit to believe what God had promised him even though- from a natural perspective- it looked foolish: the Spirit stirred up unquenchable hope within his heart. Even when commanded by God to sacrifice Isaac his own son , he obeyed. We can only guess at the depth of the terrible turmoil which raged through his spirit as he climbed Mount Moriah

to offer up Isaac, yet, in spite of this, he still nurtured the inextinguishable hope that God **WOULD VINDICATE HIS PROMISES.**

Hebrews 6:12 makes it very clear that our attitude should be to learn from those heroes of the faith like Abraham:

“Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.”

UNCONDITIONAL PROMISES AND CONDITIONAL PROMISES

Some of God’s promises and **UNCONDITIONAL** - in other words, He will fulfil his promise whatever human beings may do, say or think. Whether they believe it or not, or whether they oppose it, He **WILL FULFIL** what he says. There are many unconditional promises in the word of God:

John 14:3: Jesus promised, “I will come again.” He **WILL** return to this earth to defeat His enemies, bring about judgment and to perfect His Church and to put the whole of society and creation in subjection to Himself!

Hebrews 13: 5 - a wonderful promise to every true believer, “I will never leave you.”

Matthew 17: 23: Jesus promised that on the third day He **WOULD** rise again from the dead and he did! The Romans and the Jewish authorities did not want Him to do so (Matt 27:62-6) but that made no difference. Whatever efforts they made to prove the contrary he **STILL** rose!!

CONDITIONAL PROMISES

In a conditional promise, God promises to do something **IF** there is a human response- in other words, man has to obey the promises!! How often do parents say to their children: “If you finish all the food on your plate, I will give you some dessert!”

God makes some wonderful conditional promises to sinners:

Acts 16:31 - If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ you will be saved.

Romans 10:9 enlarges on the previous verse:

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved.

Promises to the believer include some significant ones: **James 4:7:**

“ Submit yourselves to God -resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

In order to gain victory over the evil one, we need to submit to God in obedience and throw ourselves wholly upon Him- then we **MUST** resist and use the authority that God has given to us.

James 4:8 promises that if we draw near to God He will draw near to us- there are times when we must play our part and this verse is very clear on this fact. Verse 10 promises that it is only through true humility that God is able to work in us and advance us in His Kingdom.

THE COVENANTS OF GOD

A covenant refers to a binding agreement between God and man (though covenants are sometimes struck between men); it is a relationship based upon mutual agreements and commitments- it involves promises, obligations and rituals. Sadly, some Christians regard the whole concept of a covenant as being dull, drab and dry as dust. Actually, the reverse is true- the whole idea of God’s covenants with us is **DYNAMIC, EXCITING** and

REASSURING because it involves relationship with the Lord and **HIS CHARACTER AND LOVE** for us guarantee that he will keep His promises in a covenant. The Hebrew word *hesed* is a powerful word which speaks of God's covenant love towards us. God's covenants contain powerful promises to us.

As with His promises, covenants can be unconditional or conditional.

The Edenic Covenant- made with Adam and Eve- here, God entered into a close relationship with Adam and Eve- but this was a conditional covenant- they had to avoid eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil- they failed to do so and the consequence was death.

The Adamic Covenant- Made with Adam before his expulsion from the garden- this covenant is unconditional and consists of a curse and a promise- there is a curse on satan as serpent, and judgments upon the man and woman- in childbirth in work and on the earth itself- the covenant will continue until the earth is renewed after Jesus' second coming.

Noahic Covenant- God's wonderful promise not to destroy humanity by flood is contained in this unconditional covenant.

Abrahamic Covenant- this unconditional covenant has never been revoked- Abraham would become the father of a new people. God will bless all nations through Israel, He will make Abraham's name great (Genesis 12:1-3 -additions were made to this covenant in Genesis 13, 15 and 17.

Mosaic Covenant- Moses was called to be the founder of a nation (not its father like Abraham) God gives His Law to Israel in this covenant.

This is very much a conditional covenant -failure to keep the covenant will result in severe consequences as seen in Deuteronomy 28.

Davidic Covenant- this is unconditional (2 Sam 7:8-9) David was promised a perpetual throne and a perpetual son through that throne- this was of course fulfilled through David's greater Son- the Lord Jesus.

The New Covenant- first spoken of by Jeremiah, this is the culmination of all covenants and it fulfils them all- it is unconditional- unlike the Mosaic Covenant which was a covenant of law it is a covenant of grace- this covenant was sealed with the blood of Christ (Luke 22:20)

“ I will put my law in their minds and I will write them on their hearts:
I will be their God and they shall be My people.” Jeremiah 31-31-3

Many blessings flow from this covenant in which God has pledged Himself to us in love through Christ- salvation as a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9), and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9-11) We gain an eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15) through Christ.

The promises of God contained in His covenants culminating in the New Covenant show the depth of his love and commitment to us- 2 Timothy 2: 13 reminds us- “If we are faithless, He is faithful.” God's commitment to us does NOT fail.

PROMISES TO ISRAEL AND THE ARAB NATIONS

The unconditional covenant to Abraham guarantees that the land of Israel has been given to the Jewish people under God's authority- it remains so- Romans 9-11 promises that the Jews who have returned in unbelief to their land will eventually turn to Him in national repentance and Israel will play a key part in the End Times-however, it is important to recall that the descendants of Ishmael - the Arabs -will also have a role in God's strategy. The unity of Jews and Arabs-which seems so far away at present- will be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit- it will be supernatural, not forged by fallible human peace agreements:

Isaiah 19: "In that day, there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria and the Assyrian will come into Egypt and the Egyptina into Assyria., and the Egyptinas will serve with the Assyrians.In that day, Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria- a blessing in the midst of the land whom the Lord of Hosts shall bless, saying, ' Blesse is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands and Israel my inheritance..."

Isaiah 60:7: " All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together to you, the rams of Nabaioth shall minister to you (these two were sons of Ishmael-Genesis 25 13):they shall ascent with acceptance on My altar and I will glorify the House of My glory."

PROMISES THROUGH PROPHETIC WORDS

Most of us have received significant personal prophecies through the prophetic word as well as the Bible- sometimes,however, what has been promised through prophecy does not always seem to come to pass,m causing great disappointment, upset and confusion for some people. This may be because the prohecies are long term and have not yet been fulfilled but will be in the future: we like to see things move at a fast pace , but God knows the end from the beginning and with Him a thousand years are as a day- his time-scale does Not always coincide with our hopes and aspirations even though we wish that it did!

It must also be remembered that prophecies MUST be weighed and tested- in the New Testament, prophetic words are not infallible in the way that they were when delivered by such Old Testament prohets as Isaiah , Ezekiel or Jeremiah- these prophecies were actually incorporated into the scriptures whereas prophecy in New Testament timesa nd beyond is fallible- 1 Thess 5: 16 warns us to test everything, 1 John 4: 1 reminds us to test the spirits to see whether they be of God and 1 Corinthinas 14:28-33 also reminds us that all prophecy must be weighed carefully and tested. It is also important to note that prophetic words may also be conditional- unless a person walks in holiness , is obedient and actively listens to the Lord then the prophecies may be fulfilled!

Sometimes, there is a real danger that prophets- in their desire to encourage or give hope to will go beyond what God is saying and project THEIR OWN DESIRES AND HOPES into a prophetic word- all prophets may be guilty of this. I have had words from well-known prophets which have simply not come true: the fact is that we prophesy IN PART - we must be careful to ensure that God CONFIRMS prophetic words through the scriptures and through the mouths of other prophets and witnesses. It is viatl that we learn to prophesy ONLY what God is saying and do not run ahead of Him : inaccurate prohecies can create false hope and discourage people if the prophecy does NOT come true. We are all learners , but we need to be cautious and to ask God to inspire us through His Spirit to give accurate words in season and not our own desires or thoughts dressed up as prophecy!

GOD'S PROMISES TO PRAY OVER OTHERS

It is wonderful to take God's promises from His word and to pray them over each other: in other words, to pray them into being and encourage each other- again, remember that obedience and a close walk with God are the conditions of many Biblical promises. Let us learn to plead the promises in the word of God:!

Promise for guidance- "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are sons of God." Romans 8:14.

Promise that God will be with us: in all circumstances:

" Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
I fear no evil for you are with me:
your rod and staff, they comfort me."

"The Lord is my light and my salvation:whom shall I fear?"
(Psalm 27)

Promises of blessing as we exercise faith and praise Him: Psalm 37

" Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires
of your heart." Psalm 37:4

"Commit your way to the Lord,
trust also in Him and he will do it.!" verse 5.

Promises of protection: Psalm 37: 23-4

" The steps of a man are established by the Lord,
and He delights in his way,
when he falls he will not be hurled headlong
because the Lord is the One who holds his hand."

Psalm 34: "The angel of the Lord encamps around those
who fear Him and rescues them." verse 7

Psalm 34: " Many are the afflictions of the righteous
but the Lord delivers him out of them all." v. 19

Psalm 91: " Because he has loved me therefore I will deliver
him/ I will set him securely on high..."

Promises of strength and healing: Psalm 103 : " Bless the Lord oh my soul,
who pardons all your sins,
and heals all your diseases...
who satisfies with good things so that your
youth is renewed like the eagle's." verses 3-5

The promise of the Holy Spirit: Luke 11:13- "How much more will the Father give
the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

God's promise to supply all our needs: Phil 4:19: "My God shall supply all your
needs according to His riches in glory in
Christ Jesus!"

