

God's life-giving promises

1—Is the world safe?

From earliest days of our human history, God has been making promises. They are the certainties we need to know as we navigate our way through all that happens in this world.

- ▣ It becomes impossible to make good decisions without some idea of where things are heading.
- ▣ Politicians know they must promise something to have us vote for them. But they can't ensure that what they promise will happen. Only God can do that!
- ▣ The Bible proceeds on the basis of promises God makes.
- ▣ Christians come to life, become fruitful, are sustained and inherit eternal life on the basis of God's promises.

God's promises may be viewed through the lens of God's covenants of promise (Eph. 2:12).

- ▣ These are the covenant made with Abraham, with David and to Israel through Jeremiah. (The Mosaic covenant administers the Abrahamic covenant rather than adds any promise.)
- ▣ To these, we may add the earlier promises made to Adam, and to Noah.
- ▣ Jesus Christ fulfills these promises so that we have ever more reason to live in hope (Rom. 15:8, 13).
- ▣ Seeing this comprehensive overview of what God wants to secure by announcing his intentions helps us hear and receive the many individual promises embedded in Bible texts.

The promise made to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15).

- ▣ The first couple assert their independence from God and want to determine right and wrong for themselves.
- ▣ Because of this, as God has told them, they will die. And since then, we all die.
- ▣ We must deal with many threats and uncertainties along the way. Death, and the fear of it, lingers closely.
- ▣ Immediately, God provides clothes. He does not wipe away what has happened but hides the shame that would prevent them relating to him.
- ▣ God promises they will have a child who will undo the mischief caused by Satan's deadly temptation.
- ▣ No sinner has ever lived in a world devoid of promise. History is not chaotic but follows the line of what God has declared to be its future.
- ▣ It will come at a cost to the promised child, but shows, immediately, that God's enemy—or enemies—will never have the last word.
- ▣ Adam calls his wife 'life'—though she has shared in the need for death. The human race may still live in expectation of a future.
- ▣ Prophets celebrate this (Isa. 65:17, 25), Jesus fulfills this (John 16:11; Gal. 4:4; 1 John 3:8), and we share in the victory (Rom. 16:20).
- ▣ From earliest days, all God's creatures have had reason to be justified by faith—faith in this promise (Heb. 11:4-6).

We can think this is just a quaint story, or we can see it the one chance we have to live a full life.

- ❑ Pessimism, apathy and anger are ruled out if we hear what God promises. Our problem is not circumstances, enemies or even bad friends but Satan messing with us relating to God. And God has promises to resolve this!
- ❑ The story that follows in the book of Genesis bears this out (chapters 3—5).
- ❑ The people who believe God’s promise—the line of Seth—find some poise and certainty, and generosity in life.
- ❑ Those who won’t believe this promise—the line of Cain—feel threatened, become angry, grasping and even cruel.
- ❑ The rest of the Bible is the story of this unfolding—and we shall see. But, already, God’s promise changes how people live.

The promise made to Noah (Gen. 8:20—9:17).

- ❑ By the time of Noah, the earth has become so violent that God promises to destroy it. Except for Noah and his family. God will be gracious to him (Genesis 6:8).
- ❑ He must build what amounts to a floating zoo to house his family and many animals.
- ❑ The flood that then comes is so comprehensive that only those floating in the ark survive. God is starting again with a new couple.
- ❑ The story (Genesis 6—9) concludes with Noah saying thank you with a sacrificial offering.
- ❑ And God makes a promise. ‘I will never again strike down every creature as I have done’ (Genesis 8:21-22).
- ❑ Seasons and harvests will continue as long as the earth remains.
- ❑ This is a promise to all of us—all of Noah’s descendants. God is establishing a relationship or covenant with the human race. He will never again reduce the world to a single family with a flood like the one they have just had.
- ❑ This is what we are to remember when we see a rainbow in the sky. Seasons and harvests will continue.

Think of the difference it makes if you have a promise that the Creator will see to it that harvests will continue.

- ❑ God tells us his reason for making this promise. ‘The intention of men’s hearts is evil from his youth’. This is the same reason he had for flooding the earth (Genesis 6:5). Nothing has really changed.
- ❑ God’s relationship to what he has made is a relationship of grace. We are not going to get what we deserve. We’ll get what he has promised.
- ❑ If this is what we believe, it makes a huge difference! Without it, we become threatened, anxious, angry, grasping, and even cruel. But believing God’s promise can make us trusting, settled, and even generous.
- ❑ We can tell the world what Paul says. ‘We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. ... He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy’ (Acts 14:15-16).
- ❑ We are facing a massive food shortage around the world. But, in fact, the world is producing more food than ever before. We don’t do very well distributing it evenly.
- ❑ Think of the difference it will make if we believe that God has promised never to destroy the means of production.
- ❑ God has promised this because he is kind. And not for any other reason.

There’s still the promise of a child to come. And this is where the next promises will take us.