

God Keeps His Promises

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What do Gennifer Flowers, Paula Jones, Kathleen Willey and Monica Lewinsky have in common? They all allege that Bill Clinton, current President of the United States, is not a promise keeper. Whether their allegations are true or false, they have forced a nation once again to consider the validity of a promise.

How valuable is a promise? I guess that all depends on who is making the promise and how committed they are to it.

Not long ago I stood before a young couple as they committed their lives to each other in marriage. I read these words as their chosen vows of love and commitment:

- *I promise to give you the best of myself and to ask of you no more than you can give.*
- *I promise to respect you as your own person and to realize that your interests, desires and needs are no less important than my own.*
- *I promise to share with you my time and my attention and to bring joy, strength and imagination into our relationship.*
- *I promise to keep myself open to you, to let you see through the window of my world into my innermost fears and feelings, hopes and dreams.*
- *I promise to grow along with you; to be willing to face changes in order to keep our relationship alive and exciting.*
- *I promise to keep God as the center and focus of our relationship, relying upon His power to strengthen us.*
- *I promise to love you in good times and in bad, with all I have to give, allowing God's grace to fill my heart and overflow to you - completely and forever.*

Do you notice a recurring phrase in those vows?

"I promise"

Are those just words, or does a promise mean something?

Obviously for many people they are just words. For others it becomes difficult if not impossible to stick with the promise because of the other partner's unwillingness. For still others those words become a *covenant*, a sealed pledge;

a "til death do us part" commitment. Those couples discover that there is power in a promise made and kept.

Sometimes when talking to a couple contemplating marriage I will say, "If this marriage thing is just an option to try for a while for you guys, please don't involve me in the process. Go to a justice of the peace or someone else. But if you really want a pastor involved, and by that choice are saying that you want God and the church to be a part of your covenant, then make sure you have counted the cost and are ready to make a promise - a life long commitment. There is power in a promise. Never underestimate the power of a promise."

God keeps His promises

As we begin this study of what it means to be ***New Covenant Christians***, it is important to acknowledge up front that our God is a promise maker and a promise keeper. Our God keeps his promises!

Before we begin discussing the covenants that God has made with his people, review with me a few Biblical passages which emphasize that God keeps his promises.

"God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" ([Numbers 23:19](#))

The obvious and expected answer to those rhetorical questions is -- **"NO!"** God does not speak and then not act. He does not promise and not fulfill. He keeps his promises.

We know that not only because he says so, but because he has demonstrated his trustworthiness repeatedly in history. In the story of Israel's dealings with God there are repeated updates along the way such as this one:

"Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled." ([Joshua 21:45](#))

Anyone who has lived in relationship with God for a period of time can echo those words with confidence. You know from experience that God keeps his promises.

It is one thing to make a promise, but another thing to be able to fulfill it. God is an omnipotent God. His power is unlimited. That makes his promises trustworthy because *he is able* to back them up! When Abraham was told by God that he would have a son in his old age, it took faith to believe.

*"Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."
([Romans 4:20-21](#))*

Notice that his faith in God's promise was strengthened because he was *"fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised."* There is nothing that God can't do! He has the power to do whatever he promises.

So what has he promised?

The Bible is full of promises. Some are general, some are specific. Some are unconditional, although most have some conditions attached.

The most important promise for humans is the basic promise of salvation that God has made through his son Jesus Christ.

"And this is what he promised us-- even eternal life." ([1 John 2:25](#))

That promise is sure as the nose on your face! You can count on it and be secure in it. Of course, you must *take* the gift in order for it to be yours personally, but as soon as you do -- you **have** eternal life. Not because of anything you have done or promise to do, but solely because of what Christ has done for you. It is a gift of grace.

God's promise of eternal life was ratified and made effective for sinners at the cross of Calvary where Jesus gave his life as an atoning sacrifice. But the actual promise of eternal life existed before the creation of this world. [Titus 1:2](#) speaks of:

*"...a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time."
([Titus 1:2](#))*

Relational covenants

Another word that is used in scripture to describe God's promises to his people is the word **Covenant**.

Because God loves his people and wants to be in relationship with us, he has made various covenants with his people throughout salvation history -- all prefiguring and leading up to his final and complete covenant that he has made through Jesus Christ.

It is because he is a God of love that he has initiated these relational covenants.

"Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands." ([Deuteronomy 7:9](#))

Notice that his covenant is referred to as a "*covenant of love*." And he is a faithful God who keeps his promises -- who keeps his covenant. You can count on him. He is more solid than the mountains.

" 'Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,' says the Lord, who has compassion on you." ([Isaiah 54:10](#))

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. It usually has certain stipulations and is sometimes mediated by a third party.

In modern times we define a host of relations by contracts. These are usually for goods or services and for hard cash. The contract, formal or informal, helps to specify failure in these relationships. The Lord did not establish a *contract* with Israel or with the church. He created a *covenant*. There is a difference. Contracts may be easily broken when one of the parties fails to keep his promise.

Take for example an informal verbal contract such as a doctor's appointment. If a patient fails to keep an appointment with a doctor, the doctor is not obligated to call the house and inquire, 'Where were you? Why didn't you show up for your appointment?' He simply goes on to his next patient and has his appointment

secretary take note of the patient who failed to keep his appointment. The patient may find it harder the next time to see the doctor. He broke an informal contract.

The Bible indicates that God's covenant with his people is more like the relational ties of a husband and wife. If a spouse fails to show up on time for dinner, the relationship and obligation isn't canceled, unlike the situation with the doctor.

This theme of a marriage-type relational covenant between God and his people runs throughout scripture.

*"For your Maker is your husband - the Lord Almighty is his name."
([Isaiah 54:5](#))*

" 'In that day,' declares the Lord, 'you will call me "my husband"; you will no longer call me "my master"... In that day I will make a covenant with them..." ([Hosea 2:16-18](#))

" 'Return, faithless people,' declares the Lord, 'for I am your husband.'" ([Jeremiah 3:14](#))

"... 'they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the Lord." ([Jeremiah 31:32](#))

The word *covenant* in Scripture signifies a sacred pledge of relational commitment.

God loves his people and he desires a meaningful relationship with us. The essence of God's eternal covenant is found in the recurring words: *"I will be your God and you shall be my people."*

That was God's intention in every covenant. That was why he created humanity and redeemed us. In the end his covenant objective will be realized forever when God's people are united with him in the earth made new.

"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be

his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."
([Revelation 21:2-3](#))

That is the end objective of God's eternal covenant.

The Edenic Covenant

Throughout salvation history, God's covenant was expressed to different persons at different times in different ways. After the Fall, every succeeding covenant was leading to the ultimate expression of his covenant in Jesus Christ - the new covenant and final word.

At creation God made a covenant with Adam and Eve. He promised to be in relationship with them and give them eternal life. At that time there was no need for a redemptive element in the covenant.

There was a stipulation, though. God asked them to avoid the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We all know the story... Adam and Eve rebelled against God and broke the covenant. God later compared his people to Adam when he said:

"Like Adam, they have broken the covenant - they were unfaithful to me."
([Hosea 6:7](#))

Although Adam and Eve could have and should have died the day they sinned, Jesus stepped in immediately to take their place. According to the previously agreed upon plan in the council chambers of the Godhead, Jesus became *"the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."* ([Revelation 13:8](#))

Our first parents owed their next breath, as do we, to the cross of Calvary. It was because of the promise of the cross that they went on living.

God's eternal covenant is in essence a *promise*.

That promise was first expressed in [Genesis 3:15](#). Speaking to the serpent, God said:

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."
([Genesis 3:15](#))

This original covenant made with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is called by scholars the Edenic Covenant.

God's covenant now took on a redemptive feature. A promised child, the Messiah, would be born as a descendant of Eve and ultimately triumph over Satan.

The enmity between the seed of the serpent (the followers of Satan) and the seed of the woman (the followers of God) is immediately seen in the next story - Cain and Abel ([Genesis 4](#)).

The Noahic Covenant

As time passed the distinction between the righteous and the wicked blurred and wickedness prevailed. God decided to bring judgment and destroy the world except for Noah, his family, and whoever would accept the provision of salvation through the ark.

To Noah God made a promise -

"But I will establish a covenant with you..." ([Genesis 6:18](#))

After the flood God reaffirmed his covenant to Noah –

"I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you... Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood... I have set my rainbow in the clouds and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth... I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God all living creatures of every kind on the earth." ([Genesis 9:9-16](#))

The Noahic covenant is a promissory covenant of grace with the whole earth. There are no obligations. It is unconditional. God's oath to Noah becomes the assurance that God's redemptive promises will not fail. He refers back to it as evidence that his covenant is trustworthy:

"To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth... my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed." ([Isaiah 54:9-10](#))

The Abrahamic Covenant

Adding to the covenants made with Adam and Noah, God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants - the Abrahamic covenant. God made a series of promises to Abraham:

"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'" ([Genesis 12:1-3](#))

It is evident from those promises that God was seeking to draw the whole earth into a covenant relationship with himself by blessing Abraham and his descendants.

God called this covenant an *everlasting covenant*:

"I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you." ([Genesis 17:7](#))

God restated the covenant promise to Abraham several times including these words:

"I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." ([Genesis 22:17-18](#))

The word "offspring" here is literally "seed." In [Galatians 3:16](#), the apostle Paul refers to this verse as a prediction of the Messiah. The descendants mentioned in the first part of the verse are plural - numerous. But the offspring referred to at the end is singular. Jesus

Christ was the "seed," or "offspring," through whom all the nations on earth would be blessed. All of these relational covenants were pointing to the coming Messiah.

The Mosaic Covenant

The next covenant in Scripture is often referred to as the Mosaic Covenant. It was a legal covenant given solely to Israel. It consisted of commandments, social judgments, and religious ordinances.

Once again God desired a relationship with his people through the covenant agreement. At Sinai, before giving the law, God said:

"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession." ([Exodus 19:4-5](#))

Notice where God wanted to bring his people - not to his law, but to *himself* -- into close, personal relationship with himself.

But in the process of educating humanity, God saw it necessary to demonstrate the futility of human works and the severity of the sin problem. It was through the giving of the law with all of its pages and pages of detail and fine points that God would help humanity to see the need of Jesus the Savior and the Gospel of grace.

This covenant of Israel is now referred to as the "Old Covenant." Since the beginning of time and up until this day there have always been those who related to God in an old-covenant or new-covenant way - according to works or grace.

Although the old covenant contained elements of grace, offering forgiveness through the sacrificial services at the temple, the people related to it on the basis of works. After God instructed Moses concerning all the laws of the covenant –

"Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.'" ([Exodus 24:7](#))

No sooner did they make those promises than they were breaking them and they continued to repeatedly break the covenant. The rest of the Old Testament shows how prone humans are to break the promises they make to God. A salvation covenant that rests in whole or in part on human promises is destined to be broken. That's why the new covenant is called a "better covenant," based on "better promises" ([Hebrews 7:22; 8:6](#)). The better promises are the promises of God rather than the promises of man.

In the next chapter we will look carefully at the differences between the old and new covenant and the implications for us as Christians.

The old covenant was filled with stipulations and conditions. Blessings were promised for obedience - including possession of the land of Canaan, protection from enemies and national prosperity. Curses were promised for disobedience including dispersion from the land and enemy captivity or dominance (which happened repeatedly throughout Israel's history).

The Davidic Covenant

Following on down through history, we come to another covenant - known as the Davidic Covenant. The covenant that God made with King David was an extension of the other Edenic and Abrahamic covenants and a part of the everlasting covenant.

David said:

"Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant...?"
([2 Samuel 23:5](#)),

referring back to the promises given in [2 Samuel 7](#). There God made a series of promises:

- To make David's name great, [v. 9](#)
- To provide a land for his people, [v. 10](#)

- To give rest from enemies, [v. 11](#)
- To establish a kingdom, [vs. 12,13](#)
- To have a loving father/son relationship, [vs. 14,15](#)

But the high point of the covenant is the promise that pointed forward to the coming Messiah:

"When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom." ([2 Samuel 7:12](#))

This promise transcended David's immediate son (Solomon, who built the temple) and pointed to the coming Messiah.

The prophets later picked up on this and spoke of the coming Messiah as a New David. He would be a descendant of David, born in Bethlehem (the city of David), and would someday sit on David's throne, reigning as a King forever. (See [Jeremiah 33:17-22](#); [Isaiah 9:6,7](#); [Ezekiel 37:25](#)).

When an angel announced to Mary that she would give birth to a Son and name him Jesus, he went on to say -

"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." ([Luke 1:32,33](#))

Jesus Christ was the final fulfillment of the covenant promises.

We've looked briefly at a series of covenants:

- Edenic
- Noahic
- Abrahamic
- Mosaic
- Davidic

Each of these covenants in one form or another was pointing to the full and final covenant fulfillment in Christ who ratified a new covenant through his shed blood on the cross.

The New Covenant -- Jesus

Since the cross, Christ himself is the relational covenant between God and humanity. Centuries before he arrived, God said to the Messiah:

"I will ...make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles." ([Isaiah 42:6](#))

For Christians, **Jesus himself** is our covenant. Jesus is the best evidence and assurance that God keeps his promises. Jesus is God's best and final promise, and in him all promises are complete, fulfilled and guaranteed. That's what 2 Corinthians 1:20 means:

"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God." ([2 Corinthians 1:20](#))

All the promises are "Yes" in Christ. The promises of every covenant are made available through Christ to all who believe in him.

- The promise of a Savior made to Adam
- The promise of faithfulness made to Noah
- The promise of a nation and a land made to Abraham and Moses
- The promise of a kingdom made to David

All these promises are fulfilled and applied and extended through Christ.

Through Christ all believers become a part of the new Israel of God - the church -

- A nation made up of people from every ethnic race
- A kingdom inaugurated at the cross and consummated at the second coming
- A people who will inherit not just the land of Palestine, but the whole earth when it is made new

Christ is our covenant and in him all the promises of God are "Yes."

Christian believers enter the new covenant relationship with God through baptism and celebrate the covenant with an ongoing renewal observance known as the Lord's supper. When Jesus established the supper he said:

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." ([Luke 22:20](#))

Nothing better indicates value and importance than the willingness to shed blood - one's very life.

It was a tradition among some Native American Indians when making a solemn covenant of friendship to cut their wrists and tie their wrists together to mingle blood and become "blood brothers".

Jesus shed his blood to ratify the most solemn relationship covenant of all history. As a result he offers us the promise of eternal life through the blood of an eternal covenant.

"The God of peace... through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep." ([Hebrews 13:20](#))

By virtue of his life, death and resurrection, Jesus has established an *eternal* covenant. He has bridged the infinite gap between God and humanity that sin created and brought all who will believe back into intimate fellowship with the loving creator God.

He promised it long ago, and he has fulfilled it, and he will bring his kingdom to final consummation when Jesus returns the second time.

God Keeps His Promises! Are you glad about that?

Not long ago my wife, Selene, and I watched that old movie, "*Gone With the Wind*." Even though I had always heard about it being one of the great classics, I had never watched it before. The two main characters, Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler, had a terrible marriage. There were times when it seemed they would

make a break-through for the better, and yet stubbornness and selfishness took over each time. The movie has a sad ending.

Rhett, played by Clark Gable, finally gives up for good and storms out of the house. Scarlett calls out "*Rhett! Rhett! If you go, where shall I go? What shall I do?*" He turns and his last words have been oft repeated as a classic line since 1939 - "*Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn.*"

After that sad ending we were getting ready for bed and Selene said, "It sure feels good knowing that we have made a promise to each other that I have no doubts or questions or fears about." I agreed!

It does feel good when promises are made and kept.

There is power in a promise. And it gives great security to know that our God keeps his promises. Be assured and confident in his promises. You can stake your life on it - *God keeps his promises!*

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." ([Hebrews 10:23](#))