

A large, ornate stained glass window featuring a prominent cross in the center. The cross is composed of various colored glass panes in shades of blue, yellow, and red, set against a dark background. The window is framed by a dark border.

A GOD OF COMMITMENT

OUR CONFIDENCE COMES FROM GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

IT'S VOCABULARY TIME!

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word most commonly translated as “promise” is the word *dabar*, which actually means “word”. *Dabar* is used to convey a solemn declaration, a commitment, or a promise from God.

This was the word used when God promised land, descendants, and blessings in the Abrahamic Covenant.

The significance is not in the words but in the inherent authority and power in God’s Word.

Berith is the Hebrew word for “covenant”.

Covenants involve promises and mutual commitments between God and humanity.

Prophetic pronouncements often contain promises from God. The Hebrew phrase *ne’um YHWH* means “thus says the Lord”. These are usually promises of restoration, redemption, and future blessing.

The New Testament most often used the word *epangelia* which also translates to “promise”. This is a divine declaration, commitment, or pledge of future blessing.

The Gospel narratives are framed around fulfillment of Old Testament promises, especially promises regarding the coming Messiah.

God's promises in the Bible apply to believers today. He has made these promises which we may claim as we grow in our relationship with Him.

THOSE OF US IN RELATIONSHIP
MUST HOLD TO THESE TRUTHS
ABOUT GOD:

HE IS TRUSTWORTHY

HE IS UNCHANGING

HE WILL DO WHAT HE SAYS HE
WILL DO

HE DOES NOT LIE

WE CAN TRUST IN HIS
PROMISES

“Now when people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold them to it. And without any question that oath is binding. God also bound Himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that He would never change His mind. So God has given both His promise and His oath. These two things are unchangeable because IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD TO LIE. Therefore we who have fled to Him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our soul. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.” (Hebrews 6:13-20)

This passage is the theological basis for our confident expectation of God's faithfulness, the trustworthiness of His promises. Relationship with God is not only a matter of what He expects from us as the Holy Spirit transforms our hearts to conform to His image---God has also made promises that we can trust Him to keep.

UNDERSTANDING DIVINE PROMISES

A divine promise is a solemn and authoritative declaration from God, conveying His commitment, intention, or pledge regarding a future event or state of being. It is communicated through HIS WORD and substantiated by HIS CHARACTER and ATTRIBUTES. These promises are LIVING REALITIES. They shaped the lives of believers in the past, and they continue to shape our lives and relationship with God today. They continue to offer us hope and guidance.

We should approach these promises He has given us with humility, recognizing the vastness of God's divine plan for our salvation and the limits of our understanding.

God's promises reveal the depth of His love, the magnitude of the power of His spoken Word, His unwavering faithfulness to us, and His omnipotence (He is all powerful, so we can be certain that He is fully able to keep His promises)

These promises may be **CONDITIONAL** or **UNCONDITIONAL**.

Unconditional promises are *promises of grace*. This means that they are gifts of God's grace. Fulfilment of these promises rests solely on God's will and power, His initiative and His love. They are not contingent on any specific human action or response (other than believing in Christ as our Savior that is). God's promises of salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ are examples of unconditional promises. Most of God's biblical covenants are unconditional gifts of His grace.

Conditional promises means that fulfilment is dependent upon human obedience to certain stipulated conditions (example: Obedience, faithfulness, adherence to God's commands). The Mosaic Covenant outlined commandments Israel was expected to follow. The Abrahamic Covenant was unconditional, but it had some conditional aspects (Abraham's obedience and faith).



God's promises also have a *temporal* aspect. Some have already been fulfilled in biblical history; some anticipate future eschatological (end times) events. We must avoid misinterpretation of the Bible to avoid disappointment and to correctly understand what God has promised believers.

How do we avoid misinterpretations? The field of Biblical Hermeneutics is dedicated to establishing principles for interpreting Scripture. These theologians examine the scriptures according to their historical, literary, and cultural contexts, their genre, and their intended audience. We have seen in previous lessons that it is important to understand the era in which the books of the Bible were written and how canon has been determined (and debated) throughout the history of the Christian church. Believer should also prayerfully seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit any time they study the Bible and avoid errors such as proof-texting (taking verses out of context to apply them to a preconceived idea or interpretation).

Some of God's promises are embedded within certain *historical events* and circumstances. The books of the prophets, for example, are better understood within their social-political settings. These were times where Israelites were betraying God by chasing pagan deities and many kings were wicked in the Lord's eyes. The Lord was sending prophets to repeatedly warn Israel and Judah to return to Him or face divine discipline. He also sent warning nations that were preying on His people.

The literary context of His promises means that we examine and interpret the promise by studying the preceding and subsequent chapters of the Bible. We have to remember that all covenants (Old Testament and New Testament) are interconnected, building on God's very first covenant in Genesis (the Adamic Covenant). We also have to consider the genre of the biblical book where the promise is found. His promises are made in various ways, including narrative, poems, prophecies, legal codes, and apocalyptic literature. We also must consider the intended audience. Some promises are directed to specific groups or individuals. The Mosaic Covenant was made with the nation of Israel even though it had implications for all nations.



GOD'S ATTRIBUTES AND PROMISES

God is OMNIPOTENT (all powerful). This gives us certainty that His divine intention becomes reality through the power behind His spoken Word. He spoke creation into being, proving that His intention becomes reality.

God is OMNISCIENT (all knowing). He sees the entirety of time, so His promises are rooted in His wisdom and encompass every potential contingency. God is never unsure or uncertain. He accounts for every factor, meticulously plans, and fulfills those plans.

God is LOVE UNWAVERING. He is committed to His promises as they express His unlimited, unconditional love for humanity. He IS love, so love motivates everything He does. His love, grace, and mercy are the roots of His covenants. Love motivates His pursuit of mankind's salvation and restoration and His promise of our eternal inheritance (Hebrews 6:17-18).

God is UNCHANGING. His promises are immutable.

God is FAITHFUL and demonstrated every time He kept a promise in the Bible (the promise to give Abraham off-spring, the promise to give Abraham's descendants a land of their own, His promise to preserve the line of David even as Judah and Israel were conquered, His promise of the Messiah).

There is a connection between God's sovereignty and human freedom. God is absolutely sovereign. He does not need human help to fulfill His promises. He can accomplish them through His will. HOWEVER, humans retain free will to choose, and this impacts the way in which God's promises unfold. Humans still have responsibility and accountability to God as part of His overarching plan for our salvation. For example: God promised to bring the Israelites into the Promised Land. However, their rebellion changed the way that plan unfolded. The rebellious generation could not enter the land, so the Israelites waited 40 years for the last of that generation to pass away before God fulfilled His promise and led them into the land.

God's promises also come from His own initiative and grace.

Understanding God's promises is foundational to Christian faith. It gives us greater insight and appreciation of His character, deeper understanding of the Bible, and hope in God's eternal plan for humankind because of the historical evidence of His faithfulness.



The Adamic Covenant was the first of the biblical covenants. This first part of the covenant takes place before the fall of man. It encompasses Adam's responsibilities as the steward over God's creation (including the command to be fruitful and multiply, filling the land with God's image) and the prohibition against eating from the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The second part of the covenant followed Adam and Eve's rebellion against God (eating from the forbidden tree). In this covenant, God promised that one of Eve's descendants would ultimately defeat Satan. This is the first biblical prophecy of the Messiah (See Genesis 1-2).

The Noahic Covenant was God's promise to Noah after the flood. God promised never to destroy the earth with a flood, which established God's commitment to mankind and the natural world. The earth would continue to support life until such time that God establishes the New Kingdom under Jesus Christ. God placed a rainbow in the clouds as a symbol of His promise to Noah.

The Abrahamic Covenant reveals more of God's plan for mankind's redemption and salvation (Genesis 12:2-3). In this covenant, God promised that Abraham would have countless descendants (which refers to the nation of Israel descending from Abraham's son Isaac, though other nations would descend from his son, Ishmael). God promised Abraham's descendants the Promised Land (which was the land of Canaan). Kings would descend from Abraham, specifically the kings of Israel and the King of Kings Jesus. God also promised that all nations would be blessed through Abraham's descendants. Specifically, they would be blessed through Abraham's descendant Jesus.

In the historic context of Abraham's time, covenants were often formalized through rituals and oaths. These rituals often included animal sacrifices where an animal was divided in half and both parties in the covenant passed between the two halves. This was a most solemn, unbreakable oath. In the Abrahamic Covenant, God alone passed between the two halves. This means that God took ALL responsibility for fulfilling the covenant upon Himself. There were also suzerain-vassal treaties.



The suzerains were the parties of greater power and were usually granting protection and blessing to the vassal in exchange for the vassal's loyalty and obedience. God is the ultimate suzerain. The gift of the land of Canaan demonstrates God's sovereignty over all nations (whether they worship Him or not) and commitment to fulfill His promise even if humans resist. The promise of an enduring lineage proved God can act beyond human limits. The fact that Abraham and Sarah would have a child together when Sarah was beyond childbearing age proves this as well. Culture in the era of Abraham considered having many descendants as a sign of favor and prosperity.

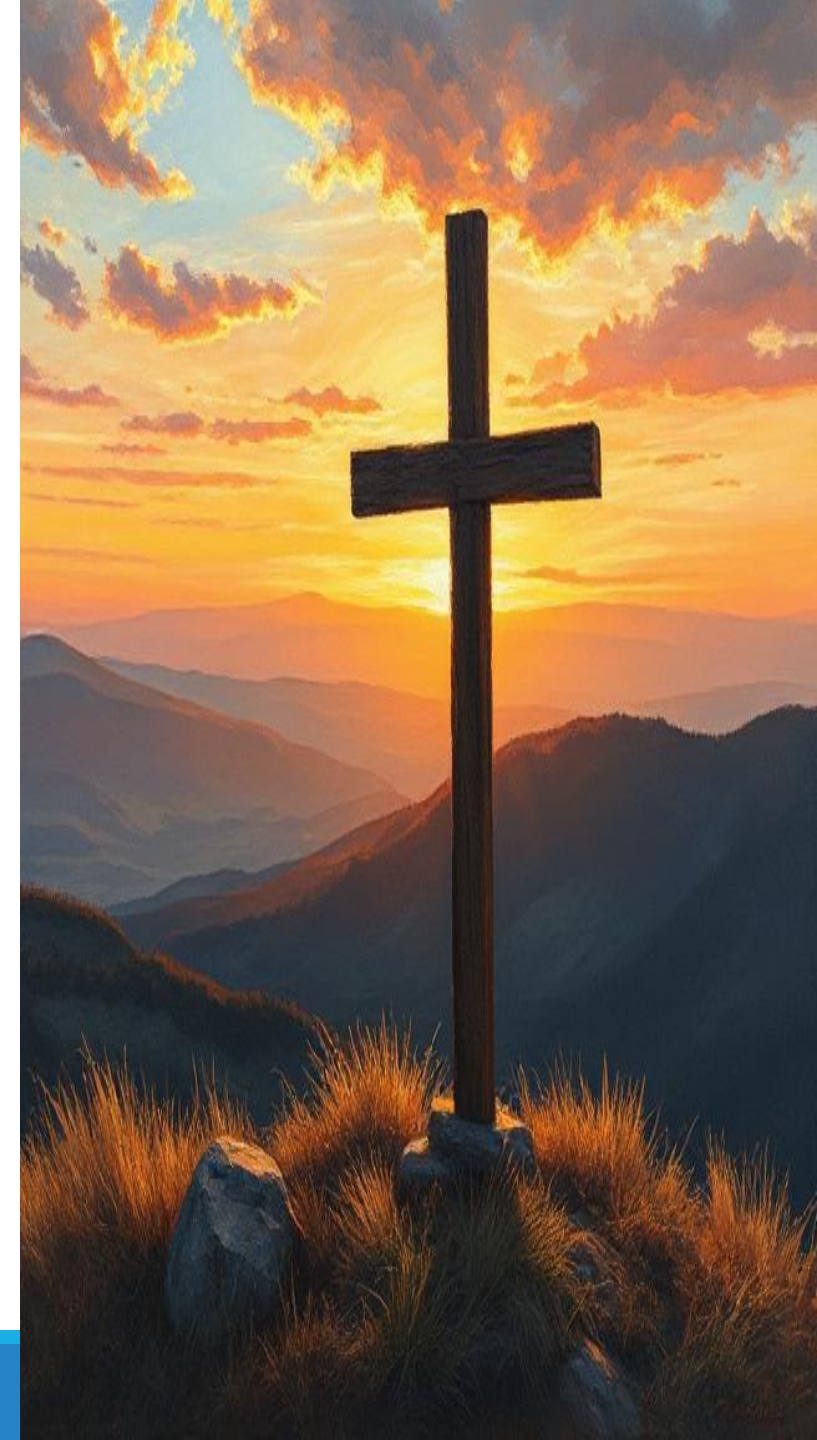
The Mosaic (Sinaitic) Covenant was made with Abraham's descendants, the nation of Israel, following God's miraculous liberation of the people from Egypt. This covenant shaped the identity and faith of the Jewish people. Their deliverance from bondage in Egypt proved God's power and His faithfulness. The Law of Moses was part of this covenant. It showed God's desire to establish a holy, just, and righteous society reflecting His ideals to the world. It is a conditional covenant in that there were obligations on the part of the Israelites (primarily the promise to obey the Law and to worship no other gods than the one true God). God promised blessings for their obedience but warned of punishments for disobedience. Unfortunately, there would be many instances of Israel's violation of this covenant. God, however, remained true to His promise to preserve this line of Eve and the descendants of Abraham from whom the Messiah would come.

The Davidic Covenant further points to the future Messiah and the New Kingdom. This promise specifies that the Messiah would descend from David (who descended from Abraham) and the tribe of Judah. This Messiah (who would sit on the Davidic throne) would establish a kingdom that would endure forever. For the sake of this covenant, God always preserved at least one descendant of David even when Israel and Judah spiraled into wickedness and were exiled to Babylon and Assyria.

The prophetic books are full of promises of the restoration of the Jewish people to their promised land and God's pronouncements of judgement directly related to the rebellion of the Jewish people and to the enemies who persecuted God's people. These books are also full of promises of the coming Messiah. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the Son of God (and the Son of Man) fulfilled these prophecies from the Old Testament.

This would happen in the historic context of the Roman occupation of Israel, the era into which Jesus was born. This is the historical context of the New Covenant (see the Book of Hebrews). This is God's covenant with all who believe in Jesus Christ that their sins will be forgiven and they will enter into a transformative relationship with God, entailing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. This indwelling of the Spirit will empower believers to obey God's commands and follow His will. Jesus alone is mediator of this covenant. This covenant is our promise of eternal life through faith in Christ. This "new and better covenant" replaces the conditional Law of Moses with the Law of grace and mercy. This means that Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Law on behalf of all mankind. We are no longer made righteous by obeying the Law; rather, we are made right when we believe in Jesus Christ as a gift of God's grace.

Even today, though, people struggle with the idea that salvation and redemption is not through good works but from God's mercy, compassion, and grace. Some people also look to priests and pastors to mediate on their behalf with God. Remember, every believer enters into a personal relationship with Christ. The days when God was hidden from mankind in the innermost sections of the tabernacle, the times when only the highest priest alone could approach after being purified, are over. In fact, the heavy curtain that sectioned off that innermost section of the temple ripped in half when Jesus died on the cross, symbolizing that believers now have direct access to God through prayer. The Holy Spirit dwelling within us is our connection to God, helping us discern His will and understand His Word.



What promises
does God make to
those in
relationship with
Him?



- **FORGIVENESS, REDEMPTION, JUSTIFICATION, SANCTIFICATION AND GRACE**
- **RESURRECTION AND ETERNAL LIFE**
- **ADOPTION INTO GOD'S FAMILY**
- **GOD'S UNWAVERING PRESENCE**
- **WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING**
- **PROTECTION AND DELIVERANCE (PROVIDENCE)**
- **PEACE, COMFORT, AND REST IN GOD'S LOVE**
- **PROVISION AND ABUNDANCE**
- **RESTORATION AND HEALING**
- **STRENGTH AND COURAGE (DIVINE EMPOWERMENT)**
- **NEW BEGINNINGS**

GOD'S PROMISE: FORGIVENESS JUSTIFICATION SANCTIFICATION REDEMPTION AND GRACE

Please read Luke Chapter 15. These parables tell us how valuable every individual believer is to God, so valuable that He pursues us and rejoices when we come to Him (or when having stumbled in faith we return to Him).

Repenting of our previous sins means doing his or her best not to follow Christ's ways rather than pursuing the things that are wicked or unrighteous in God's eyes. We will make mistakes as we wrestle with our sinful tendencies, but our hearts are dedicated to trying to do right in God's eyes. Receiving Jesus Christ as our Savior means that we understand we cannot overcome the sinfulness within us without Christ's help, and we accept that He has given Himself as a sacrifice on our behalf and is the Savior we personally choose as our own.

These two actions are essentially the only steps that the believer can take on behalf of his or her own salvation. God takes it from there. Baptism is not an act to earn our salvation, it is a symbolic action of being buried like our Savior (the water representing being buried like Christ, coming out of the water symbolizing our resurrection from death just as Christ was resurrected). Repenting and believing in Christ

JUSTIFICATION (see Romans 3:28) is God declaring us "not guilty" in His own eyes of any sins that we have committed. Our sins are erased. Christ lived a life completely without sin and died as the perfect atoning sacrifice. In other words, He took the death penalty for sin as required by God's holiness and justice, and He did it so that believers would not be convicted and sentenced to eternal death. Christ's righteousness is now imparted to us, justifying us in God's eyes. We are forgiven by God. Martin Luther calls this concept *SOLA FIDE* ("faith alone"), which means that we are not justified before God by our own good works but only by faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, accepting His sacrifice on our behalf.

This justification is a gift of God's grace because of His love for us and His desire that we share eternal life with Him rather than suffer eternal separation from Him. We no longer live in the guilt and shame of what we have done in the past, but rather have a new hope for a future with God and healing from the pain that sinful life has caused us. This does not mean that our lives will be perfect while we remain in this fallen world; it only means that we have been perfected in God's eyes. Justification sets the stage for Sanctification.



When the believer receives Jesus Christ and begins a relationship of prayer, study of God's Word, and pursuit of a life of obedience to God, the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts to help guide us. We have begun a lifelong process of being transformed into the *imago dei*, the image of Jesus Christ by living lives that reflect Christ to others. We are becoming more like Jesus in everything that we do as God's grace works within us to change how we see the world, to foster love and grace within us, and to transform how we conduct ourselves in all aspects of our daily lives. 2 Corinthians 3:18 tells us that we are being transformed so that God is magnified and glorified before others in this world. When people see believers acting and speaking with God's love, compassion, justice, mercy, and grace in what we do, they see a reflection of God Himself. The life of the Apostle Paul (see the Book of Acts) is a perfect example of the profound transformation that comes with conviction by the Holy Spirit, repentance, belief, receiving God's grace, and being sanctified to live a life that reflects God's forgiveness and grace.

How does the Holy Spirit sanctify us? The first step is *CONVICTION*. In short: The Holy Spirit makes us aware of our own sinful condition. It's not pleasant, but it's necessary. When you feel the weight of guilt and shame, please remember that it is not God's desire to hurt you. He's as a Father telling His beloved child that these behaviors wound the child, wound the Father, and wound the people around them. The Father doesn't want to heap punishment on us, quite the opposite, He wants to change this self-destructive behavior before punishment is unavoidable (we can only change ourselves while we are alive, we cannot repent after death on the Day of Judgement). The Holy Spirit guides us to the truth that sin is in the world and sin is within us, but we do not have to remain trapped in our sins. There's a hope to escape. When we receive that truth, the Holy Spirit begins the process of *GUIDANCE* in how to live in a manner that is right in God's eyes and extends His love into the world. The Spirit does this by *ILLUMINATION* (helping us to correctly understand God's Word), by connecting us to God when we pray, by bringing us into fellowship with other believers in the church body, and by *STRENGTHENING* us as we face challenges and temptations in our daily lives.

The Holy Spirit will not force this life on us: Believer's have to make the choice to follow Christ anew every day. We will struggle with sin every day. Reliance on God's grace helps us. Each day we continue the process of maturing spiritually in Christ. Grace isn't just a condition of our heart; it expresses itself in ministry and service to other people around us. Justification is the foundation of this new life; sanctification is the fruit of the seeds the Spirit plants in us.



How will we know that the Spirit is transforming us? We will see the evidence in what is called the “fruits of the Spirit”:

LOVE: Which reaches vertically/upwards towards God and horizontally/outwards towards other people. This doesn’t mean we condone everything that other people do, especially sinful or harmful behaviors. It means that our responses are always tempered by love for others and the desire to see them receive the same hope and peace that we have found in Christ. This love is selfless in its nature.

JOY: Doesn’t mean that our lives are perfect and free of any problems (that’s just not how this fallen world works). Joy is knowing that we are loved freely by God and adopted into His chosen family, looking forward to resurrection to the future Kingdom of Christ when there will be no more sorrow and suffering. Joy is experiencing God’s love, including when we share that love through ministering to others in need.

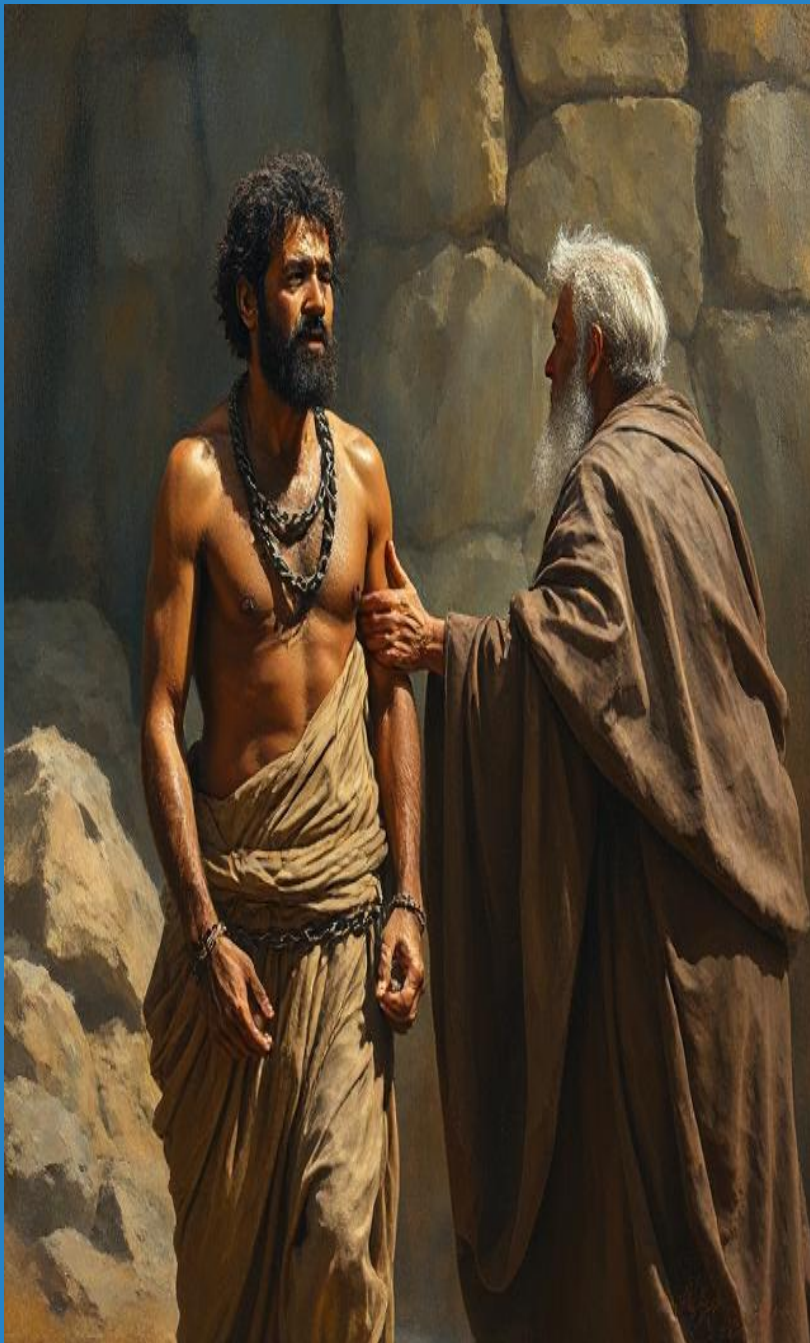
PEACE: Again, is not the absence of trouble but confidence that God is with us and His Spirit will help us endure times of sorrow, suffering, and other challenges of this life.

PATIENCE: Is as the Bible teaches us: Being slow to anger, merciful to others, thoughtful in our words (building up others instead of tearing them down), and demonstrative of God’s love. It means enduring times of suffering and sorrow.

KINDNESS: Showing concern for others through acts of service, generosity, and compassion without consideration of whether the recipient is deserving or not (remembering that we did not deserve the kindness that we received when God made a way for our salvation and adoption).

GOODNESS: This is the quality of doing what God teaches us is righteous and moral and holy (at least giving our best effort to do so and praying in the Spirit for help to do so).

GENTLENESS: Being humble in all that we do, acting with care and calm towards others.



FAITHFULNESS: Being steadfast in our pursuit of relationship with God; being dependable, honest, and trustworthy in our relationships with others (personal, workplace, and social).

SELF-CONTROL: The ability to manage how we conduct ourselves in our daily interactions and when we are facing times of temptation and suffering. We do not respond according to the ways of this world or the temptations of the flesh but rather we pursue what God's priorities and what He teaches us is righteous behavior.

Finally, let's examine what is meant by REDEMPTION. The Book of Ruth introduces us to the concept of the kinsman-redeemer. The Hebrew word for this is "go'el", and it comes from the Law of Moses. When a person faced unfortunate circumstances (poverty, slavery, injustice, or in Ruth's case being widowed and childless, in some need of vindication or justice), his or her nearest related male family member could act on their behalf to help them out of their circumstances. This reflects God's own provision, justice, and mercy for His people. Boaz in the Book of Ruth foreshadows mankind's ultimate kinsman-redeemer, Jesus Christ. Jesus has redeemed every believer, as we needed vindication and extraction from our sinful condition so that we could be restored to God's family. He has redeemed us and restored us to God.

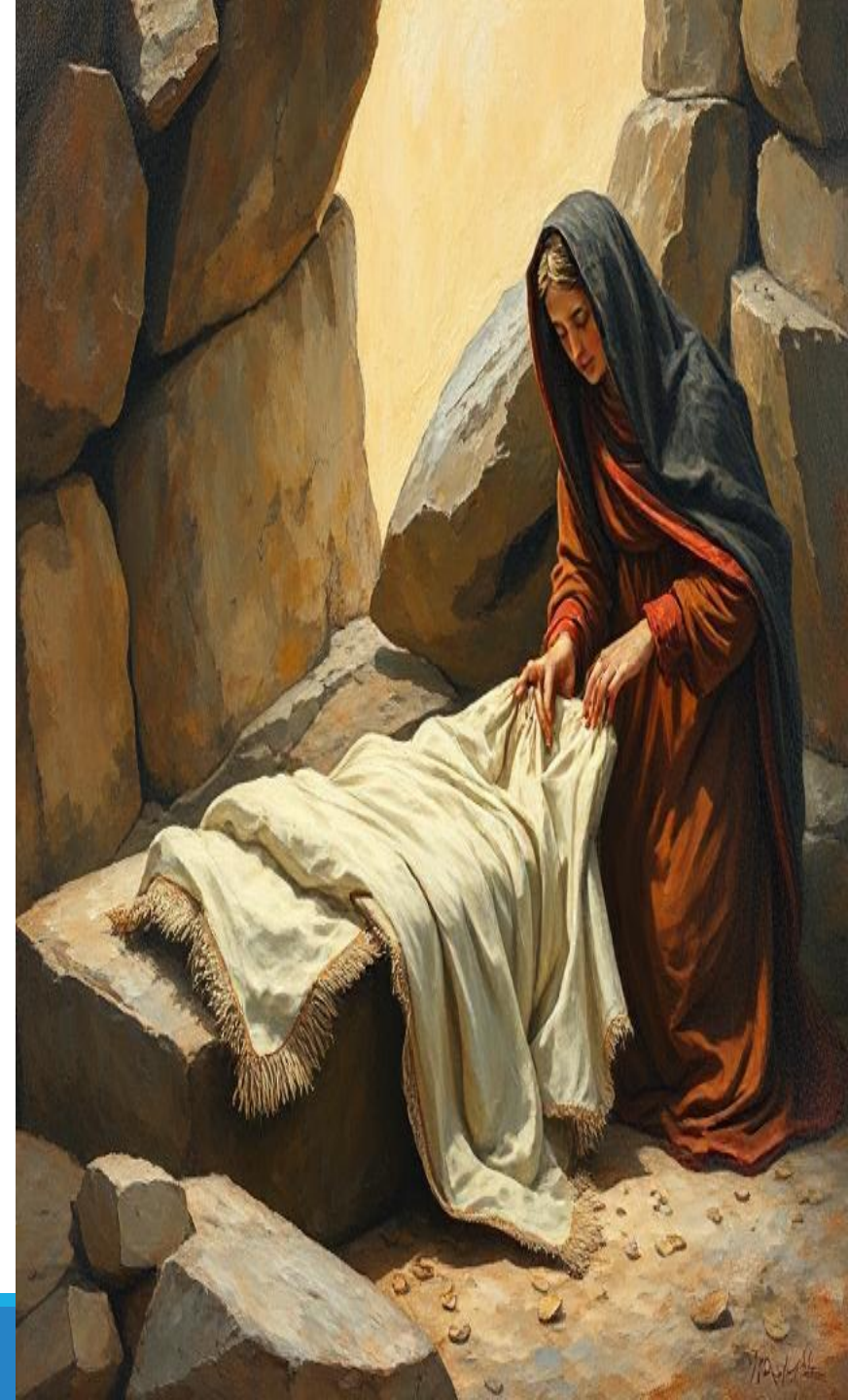
GOD'S PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE AND RESURRECTION

This promise is founded upon God's love, Christ's atoning sacrifice, and our redemption, justification, and sanctification. Eternal life is more than extended lifespan, it is an entirely different state of being, a *state of intimate communion with God, free from the constraints of sin and death*. It means relationship with God and the joy of fellowship with God with the absence of the suffering and death that characterizes our current fallen world.

Eternal life begins with *believing* in what Christ has done for us and trusting Him wholeheartedly as our Lord and Savior. We have committed our lives to following in His ways (see Hebrews 9:27-28). We discussed this relationship in the section on justification and redemption. Receiving Jesus as our Savior has removed the barrier between us and God (symbolized by the tearing of the veil in the temple) because Christ has become our Redeemer, Priest, and the only mediator between humanity and God.

We see through this that eternal life begins in the *present*. The Kingdom of Christ has already begun on earth in the form of the church family. We enter into this life, which is marked by ongoing relationship with Jesus, a relationship of peace, joy, and deepening understanding of God's love but also by worship of God and service to others (see Revelation 7:9-10). Eternal life also means the future resurrection of our bodies, albeit in a new and glorified condition that will reflect the resurrected Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15:51-54). Eternal life with Jesus on the throne of David in the New Kingdom is the culmination of every one of God's biblical covenants regarding mankind's reconciliation to Him and restoration of humankind into relationship with God.

These truths should shape our perspectives on the current world and our priorities and purposes for our present lives.



GOD'S PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE AND RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:20 calls Christ the “first fruit” raised from the dead, meaning that His resurrection was the first act of God’s orchestrated plan for the resurrection of all believers. He was raised into a perfected, glorified, resurrection body as an act of God’s sovereign power over life and death. This act validated Christ’s claims of divinity and is the evidence of His authority over sin and death. This victory will be shared by all who believe in Him, so we no longer need to be enslaved by our fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15). This should give us both confidence and incentive to live a godly life right now even while we look forward to a future of eternal glory. *Living godly lives now demonstrates for others that our actions and words in this lifetime have eternal consequences.* It should give our lives purpose and meaning.

Why is the concept of resurrection so important? BECAUSE IF CHRIST WAS NOT RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THEN CHRISTIAN FAITH IS MEANINGLESS (1 Corinthians 15). If Christ was not raised from the dead, then He is not who He claimed to be and all our hope for the future is in vain.

John 5:28-29 warns of a Day of Judgement for both the righteous and the unrighteous. Everyone will be raised from the dead. Unfortunately, the unrighteous (those who have not chosen Christ as Savior) are raised to condemnation. The believer will be raised to new life as God has promised.

Resurrection should not be confused with *regeneration*. The latter refers to spiritual rebirth that happens as an act of God giving new spiritual life to the believer through the indwelling Holy Spirit. That regeneration is an internal transformation that is happening in the present. The resurrection of the believer into a new and glorified body is a future event. Both resurrection and regeneration are essential to God’s plans for our personal redemption.





GOD'S PROMISE: ADOPTION INTO HIS FAMILY

Galatians 4:4-7 reminds us that Christ's sacrifice opened the door to our personal sanctification, justification, and resurrection. It removed the barriers between God and mankind that were established by the fall of man in the Book of Genesis. God chose the descendants of Abraham (who became the nation of Israel) to be His chosen people through whom all nations would be blessed. God became flesh in the form of Jesus Christ, a descendant of Abraham. Prior to this time, Israel was separated from

the other nations, the Gentile people, who were declared to be unclean. With the death of Christ for all mankind, God declared that there was no longer a distinction between Israelite or Gentile, that the Gentile nations were no longer unclean (see Acts 10). Rather, the apostles began to spread the Gospel Message of Christ to the Gentile people along with the Hebrew people, inviting anyone who believed to become part of God's chosen family. As adopted children (the Bible calls us "grafted" into the vine that is Jesus Christ), we now have the right to claim God's promises and share in God's divine nature as we are transformed by sanctification and spiritual growth to become more like Christ.

We have received our Father's grace and provision (Romans 8:32), His blessings, guidance, comfort, strength, wisdom, and provision. We join the family of other believers, where we share encouragement, support, and accountability). We have new responsibilities as members of God's family (Ephesians 5:1), in particular the responsibility to strive to live holy lives which reflect our Father's character (love, compassion, kindness, mercy, justice, forgiveness). We are responsible to bear fruit (John 15:8) by our actions, relationships, and service to others. We are responsible to share the Gospel message so that others might receive Christ and also be adopted into God's family. God does all this because He loves us and desires what is best for us: at minimum, we should serve and love others because of our love and gratitude to God for this gift. Love, not obligation, is the reason we obey God's Word and follow His ways. Our lives are now marked by relationship, service, witnessing for Christ, gratitude to God, love, spiritual growth, and deepening intimacy with God in our daily lives.



GOD'S PROMISE: HIS UNWAVERING PRESENCE

The Bible shows us that God is intimately involved in the lives of His people, beginning in the earliest times when He personally walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden prior to the fall. God was made flesh in Jesus Christ, who lived among His people and shared His life with His disciples and apostles. God personally indwells His believers now in the form of the Holy Spirit. God's manifest presence was the tangible demonstration of His protection, guidance, and reassurance during times of hardship and the evidence of God's desire for close communion with His people. He has demonstrated His commitment to the good of His people. He will once again dwell among His people in the New Kingdom.

The ministry of the Prophets was another way that God's presence was manifested among His people. Through the prophets, God gave His people direction, admonishment, discipline, and encouragement. He sustained and strengthened His prophets in their times of suffering. He did the same for Christ and His Apostles.

Christ Himself was the ultimate revelation of God's presence and the demonstration of God's presence, love, compassion, teaching, healing, and discipline for His people. The Holy Spirit within believers now is our comforter, guide, and our source of strength and empowerment during times of grief, hardship, and suffering. He gives us spiritual gifts so that we can live in a manner that pleases God (1 Corinthians 12; Galatians 5). The Spirit is our constant companion who gives us direct access to God. We see, then, that God's presence isn't a passive experience but an active partnership in our daily lives.

GOD'S PROMISES: WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING

James 1:5 tells us that seeking divine wisdom and understanding is imperative to spiritual discernment, grace, and confidence in our lives. This sort of wisdom isn't acquired by intellect or experience but is the gift of God to those who humbly seek Him. God cultivates wisdom and discernment within a heart that believes and a mind that is attuned to His will and a spirit that is sensitive to His leading. It is the kind of wisdom that is characterized by humility, prayer, and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is one of the primary avenues through which God opens the door to wisdom and understanding. The Bible encompasses His guidance and teachings. The Holy Spirit illuminates its principles and truths for the believer. With careful, humble, and prayerful study of the Bible, the believer develops understanding of God's character, purposes, and will for our lives. We gain practical guidance for all aspects of our lives.

God also provides wisdom through our circumstances and experiences (although these can only be properly discerned with familiarity with biblical teachings). These experiences can be painful, but should be viewed as opportunities for growth and education. We can also gain insight through the counsel from trusted spiritual mentors and church elders (Christians who are matured in their faith).

Seeking wisdom is a lifelong journey, one that requires humility, perseverance, and reliance on God's grace. The rewards are great: We are transformed by wisdom. It shapes our character and refines our judgment. Wisdom equips us to face life's challenges. Most importantly, it gives us hope for the future that God has promised us.



GOD'S PROMISES: PROVISION & DELIVERANCE

Before we start, let's clear up a common misconception about God's provision: People tend to equate "prosperity" or lack of hardship with God's blessing or, conversely, to think of poverty, hardship, and affliction as a sign of God's displeasure or being "cursed". Neither of these beliefs are accurate. We have to bear in mind that there is still an enemy at work in this world, one who will do all in his power to separate us from God, even fool us into believing that we are cursed or have fallen from God's favor. Jesus Christ flatly tells us in the Bible that we will have troubles in this world. God did not spare Jesus from the necessity of the cross. The apostles who served God often lived simply, enduring suffering (such as Paul's thorn) met with eventual martyrdom. Many prophets of the Old Testament were called to suffering, hardship, and even death in the service of God. Nevertheless, every person who suffered for the sake of serving the Lord knew that God was with them, providing for them and delivering them from dire circumstances until the hour that He alone appointed for them to be called home.

God is actively involved in safeguarding His children and working for their good. When there are times of hardship or suffering, we can still be confident that God's presence and power are with us to physically preserve us and safeguard us spiritually from external threats, spiritual deception, and sin. DIVINE PROVIDENCE is God's active and deliberate involvement in the affairs of this world as He orchestrates history according to His will for His ultimate purposes. DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY is God's ultimate authority and control over creation. There is nothing outside his purview, knowledge or power. We see examples of His providence and sovereignty in the narratives of the Exodus and the narrative of Daniel in the lion's den. We can be confident that He is ultimately in control, which should anchor our faith and trust in His plans. We should also understand that, as believers, we still have responsibility to choose His ways and to understand the impact of our actions on our own future and the well-being of others.



The confusion comes when we forget that God's protection and deliverance will not always manifest in ways that we expect (or even demand). "My will" does not mean "Thy Will" (our ways and thoughts are not God's ways and thoughts). God has the Big Picture, while we see only the small moment in redemption history into which we are born. God does sometimes allow suffering, hardship, and death for reasons that transcend our understanding (see the Book of Job). God's protection doesn't mean the absence of difficulties or getting everything that we ask of Him. God uses circumstances to refine our faith, to deepen our relationship with Him, and to demonstrate His sovereign power (see Psalm 56). He also uses times of hardship to cultivate our faith and trust in Him. Every parent has been through the times when we have to say "no" to our children's request no matter how earnestly they beg or make their case to us. We have the Big Picture, while the child is still learning. The child's response can often be hurtful to the parent (up to and including threats to withhold their love from the parents). Believers sometimes act the same way towards their Father, up to threatening to abandon their faith when God does not respond as they wish. Remember, the Bible tells us not to put God to the test. Jesus was always submissive to God regardless of what it meant; we must follow this example. When God refused Paul's request to remove the thorn, He explained that His grace was sufficient to sustain Paul and that His power was made perfect in Paul's weakness. It could be that our time of weakness will be God's moment to display His miraculous ability to sustain and deliver us for the whole world to see (and to come into saving faith).

How do we claim God's promise of providence and deliverance (whatever form it may take)? It starts by believing God's ability and willingness to do all that He's promised. It continues when we strive to live according to His will, seeking His guidance in all things. We prayerfully acknowledge our dependence on God and His authority over our lives. We actively seek His wisdom and guidance through prayer, Scripture, and wise counsel from mature believers. We recognize that there are spiritual and physical dangers in our lives, but we surrender our anxieties to God's care, knowing that ultimately we still have a reason to hope for our eternal future and salvation in Christ.





GOD'S PROMISES: PEACE, COMFORT, AND REST IN GOD'S LOVE

What does it mean when we say that peace and comfort can be found in God's unwavering presence and love? It means solace during times of difficulty. It means having a hope that transcends earthly reason or understanding. It means a peace in our spirit that grounds our hearts and minds and Jesus and gives us strength to resist the tribulations of this world (Philippians 4:7)

This kind of peace is an inner serenity that stems from a deep and abiding relationship with God. It is a tranquil relationship with God where His provision, guidance, and restoration of our hearts, minds, and souls are evident to us and to those around us (Isaiah 26:3). It is an unwordly peace because God's peace is not dependent upon external factors (such as material comforts, social status, or worldly achievement). This kind of peace is not easily disrupted or undermined by the temporary circumstances of this world. Even as we encounter difficulties and challenges, this peace enables our minds, thoughts, and hearts to focus on trusting God and relying on His sustaining presence. We can acknowledge that we are in a time of suffering, but we need to be afraid of such times. God has changed how we view such times, and this new perspective provides strength, resilience, and profound hope during such adversity.

It is natural to feel fear when we live in a sinful fallen world. We fear for our lives, fear starvation and poverty, fear for our relationships, for financial stability, for health, for our perception of "failure", for social stigmatization or public humiliation, fear war and political strife, we fear confrontation, we fear public speaking, and all manners of phobias. What does the Bible tell us? FEAR NOT for God is with us. The only kind of fear that comes from wisdom is the fear of the Lord (and this kind of fear means veneration, awe, and worship rather than trembling or cowering). How do we move past fear of temporary worldly situations? First by using anxieties as opportunities to reaffirm our faith and dependence on God and to consciously, gratefully focus on God's daily blessings in our lives. We can spend time in the company of other believers, encouraging and supporting one another as the hands and feet of God in this world. We can also return to prayer and Scripture for the reassurances they provide. We can also extend that hope and peace to others through ministry as God's agents of reconciliation in this world.



GOD'S PROMISES: PROVISION AND ABUNDANCE

God has committed to meeting our needs, but we see that this provision may not manifest in the ways that we anticipate, request, or even demand of Him. It is a promise to provide for both our temporal and spiritual well-being, but it does not guarantee material prosperity. God provides for His people by sending manna from heaven in the Book of Exodus. When they complained and demanded meat, God provided meat but as a form of discipline for their lack of trust, humility, and gratitude. In 1 Kings 17, God sustains the prophet Elijah by sending ravens to bring him bread and meat. What we need to keep in mind is that God's providence is not a reward for our righteousness but an act of His love, mercy, and grace towards us.

Jesus' ministry showed many acts of miraculous provision (healing, wine, loaves and fishes, casting out demons). These miracles proved God's power to meet our physical and spiritual needs regardless of our circumstances. We also saw that God provided for all of the apostle Paul's physical and spiritual needs, but Paul still lived with poverty, suffering, and hardship. God's greatest provision for Paul, beyond bringing Paul to saving faith in Christ, was the spiritual strength that Paul needed to sustain his faith, resilience, and assurance of God's grace.

True abundance comes from a close relationship with God and spiritual riches that He bestows.

The other aspect of God's provision is our role as agents of this provision for others. We are to be good stewards of God's blessings (see Matthew 25) and wisely use the resources He gives us to further His purposes in the world. Yes, this sometimes takes the form of tithing so that the church is funded in its care of the community. It also takes the form of other charitable giving and of the donation of our time, talents, and labor to further God's work in the community and the world. This is a privilege, not a burden, for a heart that is content, grateful, and trusting to God's provision. A relationship of contentment, purpose, love, and trust leads to a life of purpose and meaning and freedom from anxious self-reliance.



GOD'S PROMISES: RESTORATION AND HEALING

Restoration and healing are part of God's provision. Such renewal encompasses our mind, body, and spirit. It comes through God's power, mercy, and compassion. The miraculous healings as documented in the Bible are manifestations of this mercy and compassion. Such physical restorations were often accompanied by spiritual transformation (or renewal), demonstrated by their response of worshipping Christ. Jesus sometimes forgave sins as part of healing (which shows that spiritual and physical well-being are connected to a degree).

Healing is often connected to faith, but again we must be clear that a lack of healing does NOT mean a believer lacks sufficient faith or has been cursed (don't let any "believer" tell you otherwise). If we went by that flawed reasoning, we would have to assume Paul lacked faith because he was not healed of the thorn in his flesh. Again, the presence of suffering and illness in the world should not negate our faith but rather challenge us to deepen our understanding and acknowledgment of God's sovereignty and grace.

How do we claim God's promises for provision and abundance and restoration?

Claiming any of God's promises begins by remaining in prayerful relationship with God and staying grounding in the teachings of Scripture. However, it is not enough for us to know God's Word, we must also faithfully, deliberately choose to obey it and find our spiritual joy and satisfaction in dedicating ourselves to God's purposes in this world.

We must also have a nuanced understanding of how "abundance" and "provision" might manifest in this world. We have seen that it doesn't work according to our demands but rather aligns with God's purposes (whether His immediate purposes for our lives or His greater purposes for redemption history). To fully commit ourselves to His will, we must cultivate an attitude of contentment and gratitude for whatever God provides to us.

Receiving God's provision and abundance (and in turn being agents of God's provision in the lives of others) requires that we be diligent stewards of any resources which God has provided to us, be it money, time, or physical work.

GOD'S PROMISES: STRENGTH AND COURAGE (DIVINE EMPOWERMENT)

God's empowering presence is our constant companion and source of strength that surpasses human understanding. It's an inner fortitude which allows us to navigate trials with grace, resilience, and hope.

This strength originates in the very nature of God, as He is omnipotent (all-powerful), and His power is a living, active force that is accessible to those who diligently seek Him (Isaiah 40:29-31). There are many scriptural references which assure us that, in times of physical peril, it is God who fights the battle on our behalf (1 Samuel 17:47, Exodus 14:14, Psalm 44:4, and 2 Chronicles 20:15 for examples).

We are empowered by the Holy Spirit that indwells us. We are also empowered by the Word of God and the transformative power of the Gospel of Christ. We have seen that believers are still dependent upon this power from God in many aspects of His promises (resurrection, restoration, healing, provision, and abundance). Like Paul, we lean on the strength that comes from the Lord at times when the flesh or the spirit are weak or faith is tested.

Like the other promises, claiming strength and courage from God begins with a prayerful relationship with God and the inspiration of the Bible. When we cultivate gratitude and actively seek to understand all the ways that God has blessed and provided for us, we shift our focus from our hardships to God's purposes for our lives and the ways that He has been faithful to us. We also receive strength, counsel, and support from the community of believers.

Self-care is also important. We have seen that many aspects of God's promises require action or response on our part. When we seek healing or strength from God, we should obey the Spirit's guidance (for example: God is faithful to heal us, but that does NOT mean that we shouldn't seek help from professionals, who also serve as agents of God's provision).

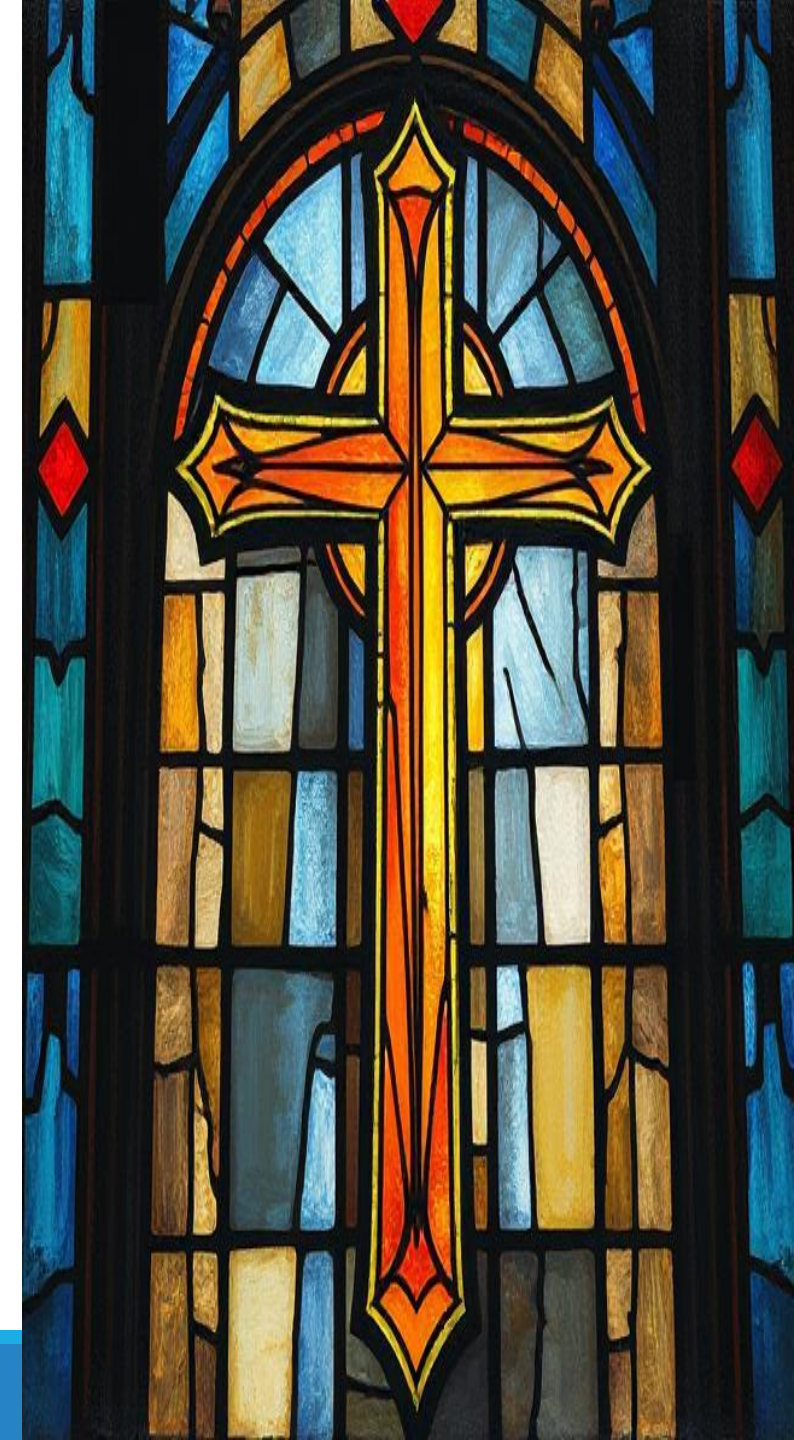


GOD'S PROMISES: NEW BEGINNINGS

The common thread of these promises is God's promise of new beginnings for believers. It begins with God's grace and mercy, which made a plan for the forgiveness and reconciliation of humankind to Him when we repent and receive Jesus Christ as our savior. This fulfills God's promise of redemption, salvation, justification, and reconciliation. We are adopted into the family of God. We have a new life in Christ, a spiritual rebirth (symbolized by baptism). The old self has died and we have become a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Holy Spirit then works to transform our hearts, minds, and priorities, cultivating new hope and new priorities in the lives of believers. This is the beginning of new lives with new hope for the future for believers, a future of resurrection and restoration instead of sin, death, and eternal separation from God. It is a fresh start for the believer. (Lamentations 3:22-23).

God doesn't dwell on our failures but offers us forgiveness and reconciliation, a chance for us to embrace spiritual transformation and growth, a transformation that transcends human limits and failures. The Bible shows us that many heroes of the faith were also fallible human beings who stumbled in their walk with God and sought His forgiveness. King David's act of adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah was a great sin, and though God's justice required that there be a penalty, God's love for David remained faithful. Near the end of his life, King Solomon sinned by participating in pagan worship of false gods, but God showed him mercy out of His great love.

The believer claims this new beginning first by honest self-reflection and acknowledging the gravity of previous sin. Sincere repentance and willingness to accept the consequences as divinely ordained opens the door for God to extend mercy through Jesus Christ. It is helpful in this process to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with people who have been harmed by our sins and extending forgiveness to those who have harmed us (which does not mean we have to place ourselves in a position to be harmed again). We can then embrace God's forgiveness and release



GOD'S PROMISES: NEW BEGINNINGS

guilt and shame for our previous sins. We can then learn to trust in God's unconditional love and actively seek His guidance for the future through prayer, scripture, and fellowship. The more we pursue spiritual growth, the greater our hope and optimism for the future, confident that God's good purposes will prevail. This confidence gives us strength to persevere and resilience in times of testing, suffering, and other challenges.

Never forget that God has fully committed Himself to the good of those who love Him because He loved them first. So great is His love that He has guided history to the moment when you are invited to come into relationship with Him. A God who offers such relationship expects commitment from us in return as He moves to fulfill every covenant promise that He has made as recorded in the Bible.

