

" Promises, promises "

[For those online, there is the text of Scripture at the end also more links/ resources]

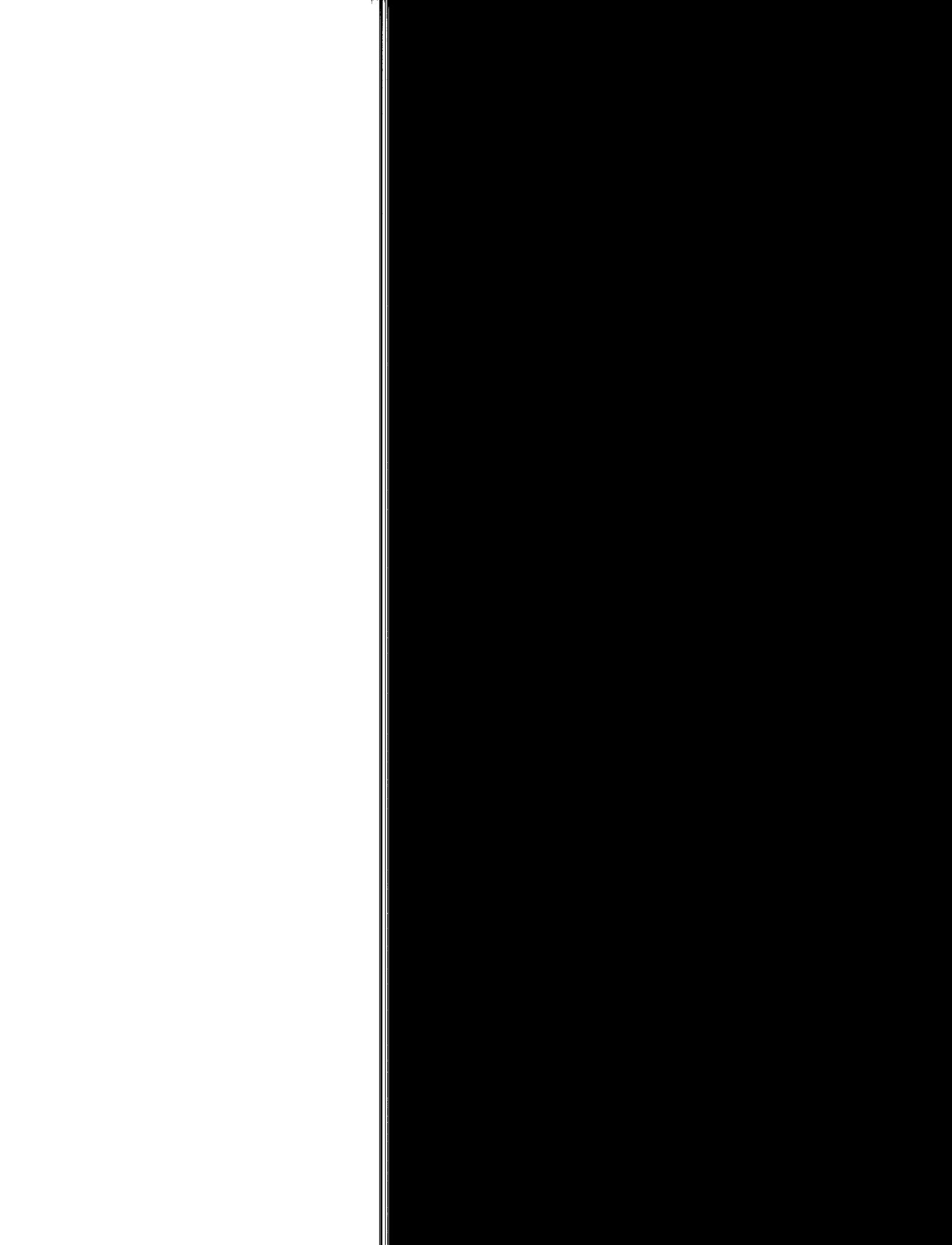
Introduction

Politicians are very good at them. Teenage boys can make sincere faces while doing this. The salesman at the import/ export shipyard is so filled with them it's a wonder he can live with himself later. The issue today is PROMISE. And all of these categories and dozens more business sectors are very good at making them. Watch late night television lately? The 30-minute promise labeled in modern vernacular the Informercial. It's not in my computer's dictionary. It's not in the vocabulary of people in Vanuatu. But it's on every channel of network TV in Australia and around the world. And it's built on something. Promises.

If you buy this product you will have an easier life. If you buy this series of videos you will be able to buy all the real estate on the planet and live happily ever after. If you do what this infoguru is saying, and buy what he is selling, you will have the women, guys, you will be a sought-after person of note. You will win in the world of social and economic losers.

Promises made.

Now there's nothing wrong with making promises, is there? Every person in this room and everyone reading this online hopes that there will be a promise made to them, even today. Yes, I will do thus and such says your friend. I will pick you up at 7 pm. I will see you tomorrow. I will write you that note. I will pray for you. I will ... I will.... I will. Those are straight-up promises on which we hope we can hang our hats.



The living God who promises

Why would God make a promise? What is it about the nature of God or the nature of promising that links them? Daniel Fuller in his book *The Unity of God* says

"a faith that only looks back to Messiah's death and resurrection is not sufficient. Forgiveness for the believer also depends on having, like Abraham, a futuristic faith in God's promises. Thus we cannot regard justifying faith as sufficient if it honors only the past fact of Messiah's death and resurrection but does not honor the future promises of God, thus mocking his character and integrity." (Zondervan, 1992)

So it is the nature and character of God that is in question for me today. If He is God and He can promise then it's his role and responsibility to follow through on those promises and enact them. He wants us to view things today and yesterday, but to look forward to the future as well. He after all looks forward to the day of full on redemption. It was His idea to make the world, and the Garden of Pleasure. He willed to put Adam and Eve into it, and to give them the pleasure that He had in himself. When they sinned it was not a surprise to him. He already had a plan to fix things. We read in the Newer Testament in the book of the Revelation,

Rev. 13:8 And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

Rev. 17:8 "The beast that you saw was and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.

In this season of the Jewish calendar when so many are worried about making it another year, and being written in the Book of Life, these words are shouting another imagery. The words, given, are the same. But the meaning is very different.

In modern Judaism, the notion of the Book of Life is an annually renewable contract with the possibility of being at next year's Rosh Hashanah services. But in the Bible, the Book of Life is the roster of those who are in heaven, eternally. And here the Bible says that the book of life had names written in it before the foundations of the world. Wow! God's plan included saving you and me long before we were a twinkle in our parents' eyes and long before Abraham and Sarah had even met.

God not only made a promise to Abraham in relation to Isaac, but also regarding Ishmael and Abimelech. Note the females of note in the text today. Sarah, Hagar, and the seven sheep are females. Of course, without a female there is not a continuity or future of the race. Without Hagar, the 'great country' of Ishmael would not have happened. But without God, Hagar and Ishmael would have been dead in the wilderness. God wants to say through this chapter that with Him nothing is impossible and with Him the future is bright.

God promised us in Leviticus that each year when we celebrate Tabernacles that we should remember His promises and rejoice. That's what I do at my home. That's what we need to do this week.

Verse one says God did what he said, and God did what he spoke. No doubt about it. God is faithful to his word.

Our role in promises

At Henry Ford's 50th Wedding anniversary celebration, a reporter asked, "How do you account for your happy marriage?" Without hesitation, Ford replied that it was the same formula that made his automobile successful-- "Stick to one model." Something about promises made under the chuppah or at the justice of the peace are often in our disposable society quickly tossed aside. But we are people of commitment as a result of our understanding the nature and character of God.

We long for God to help us be the people of promise. We want to trust him, but often we fail. Listen, you can't break God's promises by leaning on

them! They become real and fixed when we have faith in them. And by faith in them, I mean faith in Him who gave those promises, don't I?

Faith and faithfulness are obviously linked in language and also in event.

Booker T. Washington describes meeting an ex-slave from Virginia in his book *Up From Slavery*. "I found that this man had made a contract with his master, two or three years previous to the Emancipation Proclamation. [This was to] the effect that the slave was to be permitted to buy himself, by paying so much per year for his body; and while he was paying for himself, he was to be permitted to labor where and for whom he pleased.

"Finding that he could secure better wages in Ohio, he went there. When freedom came, he was still in debt to his master some three hundred dollars. Notwithstanding that the Emancipation Proclamation freed him from any obligation to his master, this black man walked the greater portion of the distance back to where his old master lived in Virginia, and placed the last dollar, with interest, in his hands.

In talking to me about this, the man told me that he knew that he did not have to pay his debt, but that he had given his word to his master, and his word he had never broken. He felt that he could not enjoy his freedom till he had fulfilled his promise." [Reported by Douglas E. Moore]

Mary Kay Ash is the founder of the cosmetic company that bears her first names. She once said, "My experience with people is that they generally do what you expect them to do." In other words, the faith she puts in her folks will produce what happens. So it is with God in this story today. God promised Abraham and He fulfilled. Abraham believed God and Sarah and he had a baby boy. So in a way God 'believed' in Abraham. He trusted Abraham to follow through in faith with what He had said. Isn't that how we defined faith? Remember? Taking God at His word. That's it.

The pleasure of fulfilled promises

Laughter was once described as similar to changing a baby's nappie- it doesn't permanently solve any problems, but it certainly makes things more acceptable for a while. Laughter is the most inexpensive medicine ever prescribed. Prov. 17:22 A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.

Maybe that's why Isaac stands in the list of Fathers, of our Patriarchs. He is the satisfaction of a rather crazy, mad, outrageous idea of God. The promise of baby's cries being louder than the moans at the old folks' home is a silly thought, unbelievable, beyond our imagination. But it's not beyond the imagination of God and well within his perview and his plan. Some rabbis go so far as to say that Sarah nursed children of others, but I think that's pushing the envelope a bit far.

Pleasure however is found in the satisfaction of the promises of God.

Piper says,

"the main reward of the kingdom...is that in the kingdom we will behold the glory of God and enjoy that glory with the very pleasure of God. One of the great frustrations of this life is that even when we are granted a glimpse of the glory of God, our capacities for pleasure are so small that we groan at the incongruity between the revelation of heaven and the response of our heart." (Pleasures of God, Christian Focus Publ, 2001, page 311)

Summary Y'shua the Great Promiser

The Bible says "the grace of appeared in Y'shua" (Titus 2.11). Paul says again "on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers" (Romans 15.8). In other words, says John Piper, Messiah "came to guarantee the promises of the Old Testament would indeed come true. He came for the sake of future grace. From the time of Christ onwards, every look back should include a look to Jesus. Without him there would be no future grace." (from his book *Future Grace*, Multnomah, 1995, page 104)

Y'shua was God's word made known to mankind. Y'shua came and tabernacled with humanity. He is the great sovereign Booth among us that reminds us of God's promises and God's capacity and longing to fulfill those promises. He will look after us. He will feed us. He will lead us. He will make us into saints who are worthy of bearing that name. Hallelujah!

Here are some things I see as we conclude today, and you can add your thoughts to your own list.

- 1) God wants us to hear his promises
- 2) God wants us to believe his promises
- 3) Laughter is good medicine and we should enjoy it
- 4) The chief purpose of man is to know God and enjoy him forever

Dear friends, we have eternal life due to the Saviour Y'shua, due to His love and forgiveness. His Resurrection has proven His new covenant. His teaching is great, and yet it goes well beyond that to His life and death. No amount of good works will give us enough information to help us overcome evil. No amount of information will help us overcome our own evil inclination. Only the messiah can repair our relationship with God, which will in turn give us pleasure with Him.