

1-1-1998

## Promise and Fulfillment: Believing the Promises of God

Victor Knowles

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Knowles, Victor (1998) "Promise and Fulfillment: Believing the Promises of God," *Leaven*: Vol. 6: Iss. 3, Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol6/iss3/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leaven by an authorized editor of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu](mailto:bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu).



# Promise and Fulfillment

## Believing the Promises of God

BY VICTOR KNOWLES

*Then he said, "Everything I told you while I was with you comes to this: All the things written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms have to be fulfilled."* (Luke 24:44 **The Message**)

The word *promise* appears more than 100 times in sacred scripture. One thousand promises are listed in *What the Bible Says about Praise and Promise*.<sup>1</sup> Thousands more are listed in Samuel Clarke's two-hundred-year-old classic, *Precious Bible Promises*. Some have suggested that there may be as many as 30,000 promises contained in Scripture.

Herbert Lockyer, in his volume *All the Promises of the Bible*,<sup>2</sup> tells the story of Everett R. Storms, a school-teacher in Canada, who made a detailed study of promises. According to *Time*,<sup>3</sup> Storms, of Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, reckoned the figure of 30,000 to be too high (since it is roughly the number of verses making up the Bible—31,173). During his twenty-seventh reading of the Bible, a task which took him a year and a half, Storms came up with a grand total of 8,810 promises (7,487 of them being promises made by God to humankind).

While we probably cannot determine the exact number of promises contained in Scripture, we can agree with what King Solomon said during his temple dedication prayer concerning the validity of the promises of God: "Praise be to the Lord. . . . Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses" (1 Kgs 8:56 NIV).

I grew up believing in the promises of God. I remember the songs we sang in church, songs that included phrases like these: *Be not dismayed what'er betide, God will take care of you. How firm a foundation . . . is laid for your faith in His excellent word! Standing on the promises I cannot fall. Sweet are the promises; kind is the word. There shall be showers of blessing; this is the promise of love. Every promise in the Book is mine; every chapter, every verse, every line.* I have since learned, of course, that every promise in the Book is *not* mine (some were exclusively for Israel, for example). But enough are mine that I can never even realize them all in my short lifetime, so I still sing these songs with great enthusiasm, gratefulness, and praise.

I was blessed to be raised in a godly home. My father was a minister of the gospel (earlier this year marked his sixtieth year of ministry), and my mother was a wonderful Christian woman. Every evening we had a time of family devotions. This included not only Bible readings and prayer but also the study of works like Donald G. Hunt's *The Unfolded Plan of God*. For example, I learned how faithful God had been in fulfilling his promises to Abraham—promises involving land, a great nation, and Messiah himself (Gen 12:1–3). Because of that panoramic study, where God proved himself over and over again to be true to his word, I have never doubted the promises of God.

The promises of God are *unfailing* (Josh 23:14; 1 Kgs 8:56). Joshua and Solomon agree that *not one word of*

## The genius of the gospel is that everyone can share in the promise— in Christ.

God's promises ever failed to come true. The promises are *upheld by God's oath* (Heb 6:12–19). It is impossible for God to lie. The promises originally *belonged to Israel* (Rom 9:4). These would include the promises of land (Acts 7:5), Davidic kingship (2 Chron 6:10–16), Messiah (Acts 13:23), and a new heart (Jer 31:33). The promises of God were always *fulfilled on schedule* (Gal 4:4). God's timing is always perfect! It is crucial to note that the promises are *centered in Christ* (2 Cor 1:20). Jesus Christ is the theme of the law, the prophets, the Psalms—indeed, all of Scripture! The promises were also *confirmed by Christ* (Rom 15:8). “Written of me” is his own interpretation and application. God's wonderful promises are *obtained through patience* (Heb 6:12, 15). Abraham had to wait many long years before realizing the fulfillment. The promises are also *kept by faith* (Rom 4:20, 21). Abraham “against hope believed in hope,” absolutely refusing to stagger at the promise of God. Finally, God's promises are described as *exceeding great and precious* (2 Pet 1:4). Dwight L. Moody said, “Let a man feed for a month on the promises of God, and he will not talk about how poor he is.” We should be so wise as to start putting a portion of the promises on our platters!

With promise comes privilege. H. L. Wilmington lists 40 promises to the believer.<sup>4</sup> For example, the believer is promised *forgiveness of sins* (Acts 2:39): “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”<sup>5</sup> The Prayer Book (1662) of the Church of England says, “Restore thou them that are penitent; *according to thy promises* declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The believer is also promised *the Holy Spirit* (Luke 24:49). Jesus called him “the Promise of My Father.” The forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit are linked in Acts 2:38. God takes away our unholy sins and fills us with the Holy Spirit. *Eternal life* is promised to believers in Christ (John 3:15, 16) “before time began” by a God who cannot lie (Tit 1:2). Jesus Christ promised believers *an abundant life* (John 10:10). His precious promises and divine power have given to us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3, 4). Those who show confidence in Christ are

assured of *answers to prayer* (1 John 5:14)—if we pray in accordance with his will. A truly grand promise is that of *the kingdom* (Jas 2:5). God has promised his glorious kingdom to the poor of this world who are rich in faith. And what is a kingdom without a crown? *The crown of life* is promised to the believer who loves God and endures trials (Jas 1:12; Rev 2:10). Another promise to the believer is that of *new heavens and a new earth* (2 Pet 3:13). It will be nothing like we have ever seen or dreamed of here, because only righteousness will dwell in this new “Promised Land.” Finally, at least for this brief synopsis, God promises the believer *a home in heaven* (John 14:1–3). We have Christ's own word on it: “If that weren't so, would I have told you that I'm on my way to get a room ready for you?” (John 14:2 *The Message*).

### Promise and Fulfillment in Scripture

The Hebrew language has no word that corresponds to *promise*. In the Old Testament scriptures we find words like *word, speak, and say* that are used instead. In other words, God's word itself is the same as a promise. Friedreich Wilhelm Krummacher said, “God's promises are, virtually, obligations that he imposes upon himself.”

In the New Covenant scriptures, *promise (epangelia)* is used in the sense of God's design to visit his people redemptively in the person of his son Jesus Christ. W. E. Vine says that a promise is “a gift graciously bestowed, not a pledge secured by negotiation.”

God's promise of Messiah is first seen in the *proto-evangelium*, given to Eve (Gen 3:15), and is repeated to Abram (Gen 12:2, 3), David (2 Sam 7:12, 13, 28), and the prophets (Isa 2:2–5; 4:2; 55:5). Alfred Edersheim counted 75 Messianic prophecies in the Pentateuch, 243 in the Prophets, and 138 in the Writings. James E. Smith streamlines 73 “Messianic foregleams,” beginning with Gen 3:15 and ending with Mal 4:5, in his book *What the Bible Says about the Promised Messiah*.<sup>6</sup>

When we come to the New Testament writings, all the promises are fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ” (2 Cor 1:20 NIV). The genius of the gospel is that everyone can share in the promise—in Christ. “This mystery is that *through the gospel* the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in *the promise in Christ Jesus*” (Eph 3:6 NIV).

Perhaps only a man like Luke could appreciate the fact that both Jew and Gentile, members of the body of Christ, could share together in the promises in Christ. Luke, as Eugene H. Peterson points out, was “the only Gentile

in an all-Jewish cast of New Testament writers.” He calls him a “vigorous champion of the outsider” because he was “an outsider himself.” Luke’s account of the gospel of Christ, according to Peterson, “shows how Jesus includes those who were typically treated as outsiders by the religious establishment of the day: women, common laborers (sheep herders), the racially different (Samaritans), the poor.” Peterson adds, “As Luke tells the story, all of us who have found ourselves on the outside looking in on life with no hope of gaining entrance (and who of us hasn’t felt it?) now find the doors wide open, found and welcomed by God in Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>

Luke’s exciting account of the birth of Messiah contains many promises: some made by angels, some made by the Holy Spirit, some made by human beings; all, ultimately, given by God; all wonderfully fulfilled in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Promise and Fulfillment in the Birth Narrative of Luke’s Gospel

The first series of promises were made by an angel of the Lord, later identified as *Gabriel* (Luke 1:19), to a devout but childless couple—a priest named *Zechariah* and his wife, *Elizabeth*—concerning the birth of their son, John the Baptist (1:5–25). In response to *Zechariah*’s prayer (1:13), *Gabriel* made a sevenfold promise: *Elizabeth*, though barren and advanced in years (1:7), would have a son, and they were to name him John (1:13); the birth of the boy would be a cause of great joy, not only to his parents, but to others as well (1:14); John (eventually known as John the Baptist) would be “great in the sight of the Lord” (1:15a); the child would be “filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth” (1:15c NIV); he would bring many in Israel back to God (1:16); and, most important of all, he would become the forerunner of Messiah. “And he will go before the Lord, in the spirit and power of *Elijah*, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (1:17 NIV).

In spite of these wonderful promises, *Zechariah* could not bring himself to believe *Gabriel*. He remained mute until John was born, as a sort of punishment for his unbelief. *Gabriel* told him, “Every word I’ve spoken to you will come true on time—*God’s* time” (1:20 *The Message*). And in “the fullness of time” all the promises concerning John were fulfilled, for *Elizabeth* gave birth to a son (1:57); his birth brought joy to many (1:58); even before birth John himself jumped for joy in his mother’s womb when she was filled with the Holy Spirit (1:40–44); Jesus later testified that “among those born of women there is no one

greater than John” (7:28 NIV); many were brought back to God by his powerful preaching (Matt 3:5, 6); and he indeed went before the Lord in the spirit and power of *Elijah* (Matt 3:1–12).

The exact fulfillment of these precise promises should make believers of us all. If the promises concerning John are true, then the promises regarding Jesus are going to be true—and the many promises that God makes to believers, including the greatest promise of all, eternal life (1 Tim 4:8), are going to be fulfilled.

*Gabriel*’s mission next took him to Nazareth, where he appeared to *Mary*, a young virgin who was engaged to a man named *Joseph*, a descendant of David. After pronouncing a blessing on her (1:28), *Gabriel* made a series of astonishing promises:

1. You will be with child (1:31a)
2. You will give birth to a son (1:31b)
3. You will call His name “Jesus” (1:31c)
4. He will achieve greatness (1:32a)
5. He will be called “the Son of the Highest” (1:32b)
6. He will be given David’s throne (1:32c)
7. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever (1:33a)
8. His kingdom will never end (1:33b)

*Mary*, understandably, was overwhelmed by this barrage of incredible news. She interrupted the angel, asking, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” (1:34). *Gabriel* explained:

9. The Holy Spirit will come upon you (1:35a)
10. The power of the Highest will overshadow you (1:35b)
11. The Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God (1:35c)

*Gabriel* concluded his message to *Mary*: “For with God nothing will be impossible” (1:37). And to her everlasting credit, *Mary* responded in faith, acceptance, and submission. “Behold the maidservant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (1:38).

Just as the angel had said, *Mary*, a virgin, found herself with child (2:5). Matthew’s Gospel clearly states that this was before *Joseph* and *Mary* “came together” as husband and wife and that *Mary* was “found with child of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 1:18). *Joseph* was assured by an angel that “that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 1:20). Matthew relates that the virgin birth of Jesus was to fulfill the prophecy of *Isaiah*: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son . . .” (Matt 1:23; Isa 7:14). If *Mary* and *Joseph* did not have a problem with the

virgin birth, and if Matthew and Luke did not have a problem with reporting the virgin birth, why should you and I have a problem with believing this particular promise of God?

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal 4:4). And Luke records that Mary did have a son (Luke 2:7), “her *firstborn* son” (so much for the doctrine of the “perpetual virginity” of Mary). The Bethlehem babe was called “Jesus” (“Jehovah is salvation”). Matthew gives us the meaning: “He will save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21).

## In Christ we are one— one person, one new person, one body, one blended family.

---

Jesus Christ achieved a greatness that no man has ever achieved. Napoleon said, “I know men; and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison.” Simply put, God highly exalted Jesus and gave him “the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9–11). Even the evil spirits, those “under the earth” (Phil 2:10), confessed that Jesus was the “Son of the Most High God” (Mark 5:7).

Christ has been given David’s throne (Acts 2:29–35). Today he is reigning over the house of Jacob (Gal 3:7–9, 26–29), and his kingdom continues—just as Daniel (Dan 2:44) and Isaiah (Isa 9:7) said: “no end . . . from that time forward, even forever.” We will have more to say about the king and his kingdom later in this study.

The final series of promises we’ll look at in Luke’s account of the birth narrative are those made by the angel(s) who proclaimed the birth of Messiah to the shepherds near Bethlehem (Luke 2:8). Appearing in the *Shekinah* (glory) of God, the angel announced the greatest news the world has ever heard! “Fear not: for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (2:10, 11 KJV). After telling the shepherds where they could find the Christ child, the angel was joined by a multitude of angels who burst forth into praise:

Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace,  
good will toward men. (2:14 KJV)

The angelic promise was one that banished fear, brought good news, produced great joy, included all people—yet was distinctly personal (“unto you”). One must remember that the “you” refers to shepherds, a part of society disdained by most. The promise was the immediate culmination of centuries of hope (“this day”), fulfilled in the city of David (Bethlehem, “house of bread”). The promise described Jesus in three beautiful words: *Saviour, Christ, Lord*. Josephus would later write, “Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man. . . . *He was the Christ.*”

### Application of the Promise “To All People”

The theme of this 55th Annual Bible Lectures is “Another King, Another Kingdom.” Jesus was a king of another sort. His kingdom was a kingdom of another kind. *Jesus Christ is an exclusive king. His kingdom is an inclusive kingdom.*

Charles Lamb said, “If Shakespeare should come into this room, we would all rise; but if Jesus Christ should come in, we would all kneel.” Why? Because “eternally, Christ is King!” Herod feared him because he had heard that Jesus was “born King of the Jews” (Matt 2:2). That could only mean political displacement for Herod. Pilate’s soldiers dressed Jesus in a scarlet robe, put a crown of thorns on his head, and bowed the knee before him, jeering, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (Matt 27:27–29). Pilate himself wrote the inscription for the cross, “JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS” (John 19:19). He was crucified as King of the Jews, but he was raised King of All! In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, John saw Jesus astride a white horse. He was clothed in a robe dipped in blood, his eyes were like flames of fire, on his head were *many* crowns, and on his robe and on his thigh was written a name: “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev 19:11–16). With Edward Perronet I sing,

All hail the power of Jesus’ name!  
Let angels prostrate fall!  
Bring forth the royal diadem,  
And crown Him Lord of all.

In contrast to Jesus’ being an exclusive king, his kingdom is portrayed in Scripture as being inclusive. That is not to say that *everyone* is automatically included in his kingdom, regardless of spiritual choices or condition. On

the contrary, Christ said that individuals had to be spiritually reborn before they could enter his kingdom (John 3:1–8). He said that conversion (becoming like a little child) was necessary for entering his kingdom (Matt 18:1–5).

But his kingdom was for *all*—not just the Jews. Someone once said, “How odd of God to choose the Jews!” The Jews did not feel that it was odd, of course, for they believed the scriptures that said that they were the chosen people of God. After all, to them belonged the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, *and the promises* (Rom 9:4). What they found amazing was the fact that God would include someone besides themselves in his eternal scheme of redemption! Paul asked them to consider an astounding question: What if God wanted to have mercy, not on the Jews only, but also on the Gentiles? He then quoted Hosea to show that this “outlandish” thought was really a promise of God: “I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ There they will be called *sons of the living God*” (Rom 9:25, 26). How could God do this? Why would God do this? “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon him. For *‘whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved’*” (Rom 10:12, 13). Israel stumbled at this teaching, but only that the Gentiles could be included (Rom 11:11). Their rejection was not total, nor was it final or fatal. “For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (Rom 11:15 NIV).

The promise of Jesus “is meant for everybody, worldwide” (Luke 2:10 *The Message*). Jesus took Jew and Gentile and “made the two one” (Eph 2:14 NIV). He did not knock their heads together; he knit their souls together (Col 2:2). By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free (1 Cor 12:13). All are sons of God who have believed in Jesus and have been baptized into Christ. In Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26, 27 NIV).

Cicero said, “All men are divided into two classes—Greek and barbarian.” But in Christ all men are one! In Christ we are one—one person, one new person, one body, one blended family. In Christ all distinctions and distinctives disappear, whether historical, political, intellectual, spiritual, cultural, sociological, racial, national, economical, or even sexual!

There is one body (Eph 4:4). As one body—the body of Christ—our hearts beat as one, our spirits soar as one, our souls feel as one, our minds think as one, our mouths

speak as one, our eyes see as one, our ears hear as one, our hands work as one, our feet move as one—for we are the body of Christ and we take our marching orders from the head of the body, even Christ! Not every member of the body has the same function, but every member has equal concern for the other. Not every member of a symphony orchestra plays the same instrument or the same notes. Not every member of a baseball team plays the same position or has the same role. In the body of Christ, we do not all do the same thing, but we all can do some thing!

The body of Christ, like the human body, is fearfully and wonderfully made. It is fashioned by the hand of God. He may add to the body whomever he pleases. Those whom he adds I must accept and love. It makes no difference if they are African American, Euro American, Asian American, Native American, non-American or un-American. It matters not a whit if they are rich or poor, educated or uneducated, whole or sick, cultured or uncultured, mature or immature. I care not what Christian college they attended (if any), what version of the Bible they use, what style of music they prefer, what convention or lectureship they attend, or what magazine they read.

*You don't have to be my twin to be my brother.* You simply have to be “in Christ.” Christ has made us one. In Christ we are one. If I am in Christ, I cannot be anywhere else. In Christ I am complete (Col 2:10), I am uncondemned (Rom 8:1), I am a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). I am fit and ready for service. I have received the promises. I am standing on the promises. I am ready to proclaim the promises to everybody in the whole wide world!

For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:39)

VICTOR KNOWLES, president, Peace on Earth Ministries, Joplin, Missouri, is editor of *One Body*.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>James Van Buren and Don DeWelt, *What the Bible Says about Praise and Promise* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1980).

<sup>2</sup>Herbert Lockyer, *All the Promises of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962).

<sup>3</sup>*Time*, December 4, 1956.

<sup>4</sup>H. L. Wilmington, *Wilmington's Book of Lists* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1988).

<sup>5</sup>Scripture quotations not otherwise noted are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

<sup>6</sup>James E. Smith, *What the Bible Says about the Promised Messiah* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1984).

<sup>7</sup>Eugene H. Peterson, introduction to the *Gospel of Luke*, in *The Message* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995).