

6. THE WORD

—God's Promises

One of the most powerful ideas in the New Testament is found in 2 Corinthians 1:20 *"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."* (NIV). By various estimates there are at least 3000 promises in the Bible, including ones as basic as *"I will never leave you; nor will I forsake you."* (Heb. 13:5 quoting Deut. 31:8).

Besides the many stories of God's interaction with humankind, the Bible is full of commands, principles and promises. These are given that we might know the character of God, and that we might embody God's character in our lives. Commands are God-given laws that demand obedience on our behalf. Principles are spiritual truths we derive through accepted rules of interpretation. God's promises are those covenantal pledges made by God - some of which are specific to a particular audience and some of which are general and timeless to a universal audience. The key to understanding commands, principles and promises is that we want to discover what they meant in light of their historical and Biblical context, and we want to determine what they mean in light of our contemporary context and application. Commands are meant to be obeyed. Principles are meant to advise. And promises are meant to be believed. Sometimes their fulfillment is conditioned upon our obedience.

Perhaps the most important covenantal promise of God is that which was given to Abraham, *"...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* (Genesis 12:3) This promise shapes the entire unfolding of the Old Testament and sets the stage for the coming of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

To Explore: The promises given to Abraham by God unfold over several decades and are repeated multiple times. *What do you discover from these four expressions?*

Genesis 12:1-3 (at age 75)

Genesis 15:5-6

Genesis 17:1-8 (at age 99)

Genesis 22:1-18 (at age 115-120?)

What do you observe about how we should view God's promises from these Old Testament passages?

Numbers 23:19

Psalms 119:140

Psalms 119:148

Read Romans 4:1-25. *How does Paul describe the faith of Abraham with regard to God's promises? How does Abraham's faithful obedience to the promise affect us in our faith?*

Read 2 Peter 1:3-8. *What was Peter's view of the promises of God? How should we respond to them?*

Read Hebrews 11:32-40. *What do you learn about how the saints of old obtained and believed God's promises?*

Read 2 Corinthians 1:20. *What do you think Paul meant when he said all of God's promises are yes in Christ and that through him is our Amen? What does that mean for us today?*

APPLICATION : How do the promises of God affect you and your faith? In what ways are you believing God's promise in obedience? Are there specific promises you need to highlight in your Bible or record in your journal? What will you do about them?