

DEVOTED

God Promises Hebrews 6:16-20

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INTRO.: Does anybody know what I'm holding? You see less and less of these today because so much business is done online now. This is a check. What is a check? It is a promise to pay. If you receive a check from someone you expect to be able to cash it for the amount that it is written for. You are actually counting on the check to be good. Maybe it's for work that you have done or possibly it's a gift. According to one statistic in 2023 approximately 17% of Americans are writing checks on a monthly basis. Now suppose, in the busyness of life you forgot about this check or maybe you even misplaced it. You come across it months later and what is your first question? Is this check still what? Is it still good? But how long is a check good for? The check was a promise of cash, but is the promise still any good? Is it still good after three months? How about after six months? Maybe the account the check was written on is now closed or the person who wrote the check assumed it wasn't going to be cashed so there are no longer sufficient funds in the account. The bottom line is that cashing a check promptly ensures that you can access the funds without issues, such as the check bouncing or having it go stale. You originally received the check as a promise to pay but maybe the promise is no longer any good. How different is this from God's promises as found in the Bible? How does God show His devotion to us in keeping His promises? Do His promises ever wear out, become stale, or are no longer valid? I mentioned a few weeks ago that there are over 7,000 promises made by God in the Bible. How many here were surprised by that number? What would happen if God didn't follow through on just one of those 7,000 plus promises. This morning we're going to look at 4 things: **THE PRINCIPLE, THE PAST, THE PRESENT, and THE FUTURE.** Now, lest you get worried we are not going to look at all 7,000 plus promises.

THE PRINCIPLE

Hebrews 6:16-20

As we read these 5 verses together, see if you discover the underlying principle as we think about God's promises.

Hebrews 6:16–20 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

So, let's take a closer look at this passage.

Hebrews 6:16 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument.

In verse 16 we see that men swear by someone greater than themselves. A mere promise to tell the truth was not enough and so they would take an oath. When people take the stand to testify in court you may hear this oath, "I will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

It was common in NT times for a person to make an oath on something or someone greater than himself – such as the altar, or the high priest, or even God. Once such an oath was made, the argument was over; the dispute was ended. It was assumed that no one would make such an oath unless he was fully determined to keep it. (John MacArthur)

These oaths were binding and couldn't be changed. This passage is a reminder that man's word is not equal to God's word. God didn't need to make an oath to confirm His word and there is nobody greater than Him to swear by. So, why do we have verse 17?

Hebrews 6:17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.

This is actually a concession to mankind. God didn't need to confirm His word with an oath. An oath didn't make His promise any more secure. He gave an oath because of the weakness of people's faith. Verse 18 is the clincher!

Hebrews 6:18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

Two "unchangeable" things: this word was used in relation to wills. Once a will was properly made it was unchangeable by anyone but the maker. (John MacArthur)

What are the two unchangeable things? It is God's promise and His oath. One of God's attributes is immutability: He is unchangeable. We read in the word of God that Jesus Christ (God, the Son) is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

In the original (Greek) it reads: "Jesus Christ yesterday and today the same and into the ages (forever)."

Because God's promise and oath is immutable, it is IMPOSSIBLE for God to lie. Our assurance lies in the trustworthiness of God and His Word. The false deities could not be trusted, and they were often portrayed as having a volatile nature. Nobody was sure how the gods would react and so people lived in constant fear of supposed gods who were not even real. Because God's Word is dependable and reliable we can take hold of (seize) the hope offered to us. This hope is Jesus Christ and the gospel message He brings.

Hebrews 6:19-20 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

This hope, Jesus Christ and the gospel He brings, is an anchor for the soul. Why does a person have an anchor?

Years ago, when we lived in Maine, I would borrow a canoe to fish for bass in some of the small ponds known for excellent bass fishing. I would bring a gallon milk jug, filled with sand, and tie a rope to it to use as an anchor. I would anchor just far enough from shore where I could cast to the brush on the shoreline. Many times, as soon as the lure hit the water, a bass would attack it. The anchor was to stop me from drifting away from my favorite spots. An anchor is particularly helpful when the wind picks up. When we face the storms that life brings it is crucial that we have an anchor.

The job of the anchor is to remain fixed in the seabed whatever the conditions at sea. Indeed, the rougher the weather the more important the anchor is for the stability and safety of the boat. It is an apt symbol of Christian hope. It was, in fact, used graphically as a symbol among early Christians, and was frequently linked with the fish symbol. (Donald Guthrie)

The rest of this passage reminds us of the truth that Jesus Christ, when He died on the cross, tore the veil that stood between us and God the Father and now He goes before the Father on our behalf as our mediator.

The principle that we begin with when considering the topic of **God Promises** is that it is impossible for God to lie. It is totally inconceivable. It is against His character. If only one of God's promises were shown to be false, He would not be God. As I began this message, I mentioned that there are over 7,000 promises of God in the Bible. Every single one of them is absolutely true and reliable. As we consider some of these promises I want us to look at the past, the present and the future.

THE PAST

When the new year began, I started reading through the Old Testament. After Adam and Eve sinned, God pronounced judgment on the serpent and Adam and Eve. These were the three parties involved in the sin and God begins with the serpent. The serpent had lied to Eve in his desire to get Eve to doubt God, which, as we know, worked.

Genesis 3:14-15 (NASB95) — **14** The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; **15** And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."

God promises enmity between the serpent and the woman and between your seed and her seed. This is an unusual construction as you read through the remainder of the Old Testament. The seed is always traced through the male LINE (Fruchtenbaum) but here it is through Eve. This points to the virgin birth, which was necessary to avoid the sin nature being passed down to the Messiah.

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

But it doesn't stop there in Genesis 3. It is said of this deliverer, in relationship to the serpent, that "He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."

The deliverer will come, and Satan will get others to crucify Him (bruise his heel) but the deliverer will rise again and Satan will ultimately be defeated forever as we read in the book of Revelation (bruise his head).

Fast forward to what God commands Abram to do and what He promises Abram in Genesis 12.

Genesis 12:1–3 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. **2** "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. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

God tells Abram to leave everything he knows to go to a land that God will show him. Through him and his seed all the peoples on the earth will be blessed. The Lord appears to Abram when he is 99 years old and states his promise to him once again.

Genesis 17:1–8 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. **2** I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." **3** Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, **4** "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. **5** No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. **6** I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. **7** 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. **8** The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

We know that God's people wandered away from Him many times, but God always preserved a remnant who followed him. They ended up in Egypt as slaves for over 400 years. They were not treated well and one could begin to wonder where is God and how are His promises being carried out? God appears to Moses in a burning bush to tell Moses he is to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let God's people go. It doesn't seem to work out because Pharaoh makes the work much harder. So, Moses returns to God asking why God has brought all this trouble on this people. The following is God's response.

Exodus 6:1–8 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country." **2** God also said to Moses, "I am the LORD. **3** I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. **4** I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. **5** Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. **6** "Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. **7** I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. **8** And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.' "

God is acting on the basis of His character and His promise. As you continue to read through the Old Testament you can see God following through on His promises. Believers need to be students of the Old Testament, not just the New Testament. Knowing and understanding the promises of God in the Old Testament and seeing their fulfillment is such an encouragement to one's faith. God always keeps His word! You can see that in the past. The principle: It is impossible for God to lie. The past: God has continued to fulfill His promises.

THE PRESENT

What are some of the promises that we read about in the New Testament? Let's look at a few passages.

John 3:16–18 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

“so loved:” this word for love is only used as it relates to God or God-empowered love (agape)

“gave:” past tense for this is an accomplished fact

“believed:” present tense

“have:” present tense for one is given eternal life at the moment of belief

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him

“condemn:” present tense for God’s purpose in sending His Son was not ongoing condemnation

“save:” past tense for God sent Jesus to save the world

John 3:18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

“believes:” present tense

“not condemned:” present tense

“does not believe:” present tense

“stands condemned:” this is ongoing condemnation as long as they don’t believe

JOHN 5:24

John 5:24 “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

“tell you:” present tense

“hears my word:” present tense

“believes:” present tense

“has eternal life:” present tense

“has crossed over:” it has happened and the results continue

Hebrews 13:5–6 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” **6** So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

For further study: Matthew 6:25-34

Matthew 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

“seek:” present tense command

The Principle: It is IMPOSSIBLE for God to lie; The Past: God has and is fulfilling His promises; The Present: His promises are active and true today.

THE FUTURE

Revelation 21:1–4 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. **2** I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. **3** 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. **4** He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. **14** We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. **15** According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. **16** For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. **18** Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Hebrews 9:27–28 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, **28** so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

SO WHAT???

What God promises He delivers. Yes, this check is a promise but sometimes the promise doesn’t come through. Sometimes the check is so old that the bank refuses to recognize it. Maybe there isn’t enough money in the account when you go to cash it. Maybe you’ve lost the check or even forgotten you have it. The promises in this book, the Bible, or just as true and reliable as when they were first written.

*Have I come to know the God of the Bible, who always keeps His promises?

*Am I willing to trust the promises of God over my feelings?

*Will I commit to reading and studying God’s Word?

*Record one promise of God a day for a month and share it with someone