

2. God's promises

May 22, 2014

As you know the Bible is full of promises of God for us. According to one person's count, there are 3,573 promises in the Bible. I am not going to verify the exact number. As many of you know, there are two types of God's promises for us – unconditional or conditional.

Three questions are useful in evaluating whether divine promises apply to our own situation:

1) Is this promise limited to a specific person or circumstance, or does it apply to all believers?

For example, the pledge made to Abraham and Sarah about giving birth to a child in Genesis 18:10 is restricted to them, however, Hebrews 13:5 contains a guarantee to all Christians that Jesus will be with them forever.

2) Are we asking the Lord to meet a need or a desire?

A need is something that we must have in order for God to complete His work in our lives. A desire is something we want for satisfaction or enjoyment. If we lose our job, then an essential – an incoming wage – is missing. But if we want a new position for personal reasons, it's a desire.

3) Before fulfilling a promise, does the Lord require some action on our part?

The majority of the OT promises are conditional promises – "If you do this, I will do that for you." On the other hand, Jesus' assurance of His presence with believers is unconditional; it does not depend on anything we do.

We have to be careful with claiming God's promise for ourselves. We have to understand whether a particular promise applies to us or not; whether it is conditional or unconditional; and how it flows in context of that particular Scripture.

By nature, God's unconditional promise is based on His grace, mercy, love, and faithfulness, it has absolutely nothing to do with us. But God's conditional promise is based on our obedience and disobedience.

Do not think that God will not do anything to us when we are disobedient to Him. His conditional promises contain two things – rewards and consequences – depending on our responses to Him.

A. A MEETING PLACE

2 Chronicles 6:18-21 "But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! 19 Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O Lord my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You: 20 that Your eyes may be open toward this temple day and night, toward the place where You said You would put Your name, that You may hear the prayer which Your servant prays toward this place. 21 And may You hear the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive.

We are glad that Solomon said this. It is important to recognize that though God had a special presence in the temple, He was far too great to be restricted to the temple.

The temple or church building is not the place where God stays like we stay at our home, rather it is the place where we come to worship and hear from Him corporately. In other words, the place is not for God, but for us.

During the time of Jesus, the Jewish religious leaders were so attached to the temple that they practically made it into an idol. Whether the place we meet our Lord is a big and beautiful church building or a rundown mobile home or under a tree in open field, it is not the place we should be concerned about, but the opportunity of worshipping the Lord in unison and hearing from Him through the Word of God should be the right concept of the church.

I asked you to underline "toward the place" in v20. For this reason, many observant Jews still pray facing the direction of the site of the temple in Jerusalem like in this photo.

I am sure that you remember what Daniel did when he found out that no one could worship any god other than king Darius.

Daniel 6:10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

From v22 to v40, Solomon asked the Lord to intervene when His people repent from their wicked ways. He understood the conditional promises of God.

B. GOD'S SECOND APPEARANCE TO SOLOMON

2 Chronicles 7:12-22 Then the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. 13 When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, 14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. 15 Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place. 16 For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. 17 As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked, and do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, 18 then I will establish the throne of your kingdom, as I covenanted with David your father, saying, 'You shall not fail to have a man as ruler in Israel.' 19 "But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods, and worship them, 20 then I will uproot them from My land which I have given them; and this house which I have sanctified for My name I will cast out of My sight, and will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. 21 And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and this house?' 22 Then they will answer, 'Because they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt,

and embraced other gods, and worshiped them and served them; therefore He has brought all this calamity on them.”

This was actually the second great appearance of God to Solomon. It was very gracious of the Lord to appear to Solomon the first time; it was even more special of Him to grant another unique appearance to Solomon the second time.

After Solomon built the temple and his palace, he came to the most dangerous period of his life – a season after great blessing and accomplishment when Solomon could start to think of himself more special than he ought to. God graciously gave Solomon a fresh revelation of Himself before this dangerous period.

The Lord started His comment to Solomon with a very comforting word, “*I have heard your prayer...*” It really doesn’t matter what wonderful sounding prayers we make. They would be useless unless the Lord hears them. The true measure of our prayer is if God in heaven answers the prayer.

The building was Solomon’s work, done in the power and inspiration of the Lord. The consecration of the building was God’s work. Solomon could build a building, but only God could sanctify and glorify it with His presence.

In my opinion, v14 is the anthem verse for revival for the believers of Christ. One of the survey articles from a Christian web site which I read recently tells me that the younger generation Christian believers do not see fornication, living together before marriage, and homosexuality as sins against the Lord. As I have said this before, Christianity in America is only one generation away from its extinction if we don’t have a revival and do not pass this godly heritage to our children.

The greater opportunity lies with the churches that are able to speak truth in love and to demonstrate that love. Many Christians are very uncomfortable engaging, for example, a homosexual in a way that demonstrates the love of Christ. But that is the world and the culture where our churches and Christians reside. We can choose to either engage or withdraw into a Christian bubble.

There are nearly 79 million Millennials those who were born between 1980 and 2000. Most of them are not Christians. The research that I read says that only about 15 percent of those in this generation are believers in Christ.

So, that means that this generation is a mission field of over 67 million men and women who do not know Christ. We can moan about the state of culture and withdraw ourselves from culture and talk bad about them. Or we can choose to love these sinners as Christ loved us sinners.

We should not and must not compromise our biblical convictions. But we should not and must not neglect to demonstrate the love of Christ to those who need Him as much as you and I do. I am hoping and praying that the Lord would raise men and women who have the hearts for this next generation in our country and bring Jesus to them from our midst.

I like what these two godly men said:

Revival is nothing less than a new beginning of obedience to God.

– Charles Finney, a 19th Century American Presbyterian minister and evangelist

Revival is an invasion from heaven that brings a conscious awareness of God.
– Stephen Olford, a 20th Century British evangelist and Bible teacher

These men understood the very elements of the revival. It must start from the hearts of the believers with true repentance of our sins. It is not good enough to acknowledge our sins; but we must also turn our life to God.

As I have watched the nightly news on TV for the past 6 years, I couldn't help but think that this once-great-country is becoming a third-world corrupt nation from top to bottom. It becomes all about grabbing and retaining power and wealth at all cost, no moral, no ethic, and no decency.

In v17, God's answer to Solomon's previous prayer had a great condition. If Solomon walked before God in obedience and faithfulness, he could expect blessing on his reign and the reign of his descendants, and the dynasty of David would endure forever. God did not demand perfect obedience from Solomon. David certainly did not walk perfectly before the Lord, and this was not out of reach for Solomon.

God's positive conditional promise which is a reward comes with a negative conditional promise which is a consequence. This was not only for Israel, but also for those who follow Christ. The Lord chastens us because He loves us.

Hebrews 12:7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

When the Lord spoke to Solomon these things, he should have taken them as warnings for the things to come, but he didn't get it.

C. IF YOU KNEW, WHY WOULD YOU DO IT?

2 Chronicles 8:11 Now Solomon brought the daughter of Pharaoh up from the City of David to the house he had built for her, for he said, "My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places to which the ark of the Lord has come are holy."

This marriage to a princess of Egypt was the first of Solomon's many ungodly marriages for his political benefits. These ungodly marriages launched the spiritual downfall of Solomon. Did Solomon not know that he was not supposed to marry a pagan idol worshipping woman? Yes, he knew, but he did it anyway by ignoring the Lord.

The principle of Solomon's sin still applies to us. If we choose to ignore God's Word and do whatever we want, we cannot blame the Lord for whatever is going to come our way.

D. THE QUEEN OF SHEBA, THE SEEKER

2 Chronicles 9:7-8 Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom! 8 Blessed be the Lord your God, who delighted in you, setting you on His throne to be king for the Lord your God! Because your God has loved Israel, to establish them forever, therefore He made you king over them, to do justice and righteousness."

Jesus used the Queen of Sheba as an example of a seeker:

Matthew 12:42 The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.

If the Queen of Sheba sought Solomon and the splendor of his kingdom so diligently , how much more should people today seek Jesus and the glory of His Kingdom. She will certainly also rise up in judgment with this generation.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Revival starts from the repented hearts of believers of Christ

2) If we know for certain that what we are going to do and want to do is a sin, stop right there. Don't go any further. Repent and turn away from the sins immediately.