

Gifts and Promises

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Throughout the Bible, God presents man with both “Gifts” and “Promises.”

But, exactly what are the Gifts and what are the Promises? Are they the same? Let’s look at some definitions from the dictionary.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Gift: a special ability for doing something; often implies special favor from God or nature.

Promise: an indication of future success or improvement; a reason to expect that something will happen in the future.

It appears that there is a similarity between the two words in their meanings.

Reading in God’s Word we see that God made promises regarding man, beginning in Genesis.

Genesis 3:14-15 So the LORD God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

This is a well-known passage concerning the pronouncement of punishment for the sin committed by Adam and Eve and concerning the serpent and his part.

God has told the serpent that something will surely happen between the descendants of both the serpent and the woman. This is a promise that is somewhat vague at this time in man’s existence, but becomes very clear many years from when God pronounces it.

John 12:31 “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.”
(Satan, the serpent, is defeated by Christ through His crucifixion and resurrection.)

We must also remember some things God has revealed to us about His nature.

1. He cannot lie.

Hebrews 6:18 ... that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

2. The Lord does not forget or ignore His promises.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Promises are made a little later to Noah after the flood.

Genesis 8:20-22 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.”

(Note: Verse 22: “While the earth remains ...”)

Genesis 9:11 “Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

As time goes by, another great promise is made through one man for all of humanity.

Abram is chosen by God to go to a land that will be an inheritance to all of Abram’s seed.

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Hebrews 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

God also proclaims that a time will come when “His people” shall know Him and acknowledge Him.

Jeremiah 31:34 “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

When God speaks to Moses and reveals his commandments for the people to live by and keep, He also reveals that another one in another time of their future will speak for God and they are instructed to listen to Him.

Deuteronomy 18:15-18 “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’ And the LORD said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good. ‘I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.’ ”

God's promises are given for the good of His people, His people being those who choose to follow Him and His commandments. God does not give weak or useless promises. However, He does also warn that His promises should be heeded or there will be consequences.

Deuteronomy 30:19 "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live ..."

Let's go back and consider a little more about Abraham and God.

God's promise to Abraham includes a part that all families of the earth shall be blessed.

Genesis 22:16-18 ... and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son — blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

Because of Abraham's obedience to God, he receives this great promise that will affect all of mankind. But just as important as his obedience to God is his belief in what God says.

Genesis 15:6 and he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. See *also Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, James 2:23*

The promises given to Abraham are key to what God teaches us about His promises and how we are to regard those promises.

When God makes a promise to Abraham that through his seed all families of the earth will be blessed, Abraham questions at first just how God will do this. Why? Because Abraham is 101 years old and his wife Sarah is 90 and there is still no heir from this union.

Sarah wants to "help" God along and offers her handmaiden to Abraham to have a son that will be the heir God has promised, since she reasons that there is absolutely no way it can happen through a union between Abraham and her.

God insists that Ishmael is NOT the heir promised to Abraham and so Isaac is born.

Now God really tests Abraham and his faith (belief) in God. God tells Abraham to take Isaac and offer him as a sacrifice to God. Here is a very key thing about Abraham and his faith. Abraham takes Isaac and prepares to follow through with what God has asked of him. Now read and see what is going on in Abraham's mind about what he is about to do.

Hebrews 11:17-19 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

Abraham reasons that even though he will offer Isaac as required by God, God will resurrect the boy to fulfill the promise.

This very important lesson is given to us to reaffirm in our minds that God is able to do all that He promises.

Jeremiah 31:31-35 “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Here it appears that Jeremiah is prophesying about some future event; and indeed it is Jeremiah who is writing as the Holy Spirit gives him the words. But, read on to the end of the passage ... “*Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The LORD of hosts is His name):*”

This is God giving a promise of things to come. When God, Who is eternal, says *this will happen or that will occur*, we can be assured that is exactly the way it will be.

Remember our study of Noah and Abraham and the things God said would happen and did happen.

In this passage, God says that He will make a new covenant with the house of Israel.

So how does this affect us who are not of the house of Israel?

We need to really pay attention to God’s *total* revelation and how it relates to all of mankind, which includes us who are not of the lineage of Abraham by birth.

Ephesians 3:1-7 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles — if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Galatians 3:7-9 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

Galatians 3:28-29 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

So now through these verses God has revealed the mystery of sonship that we as Gentiles are to inherit the blessings of God and the promises given to Abraham, our *father in faith*.

Other prophets of God, particularly Isaiah, have given us a look into God's choosing Jesus, His only Son, to be the deliverer of all of mankind.

Isaiah 42:1 "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.

Of course there is the promise of one who would specifically point to The Messiah come in the flesh.

Isaiah 40:1-3 "Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" Says your God. "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the LORD's hand Double for all her sins." The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God."

John 1:19-23 Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD,"" as the prophet Isaiah said."

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

One of the earliest mentions of a **gift** in the Bible can be found in the book of **Numbers**.

Numbers 3:9 "And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are given entirely to him from among the children of Israel."

In this passage, God is telling Moses that He has given the entire tribe of Levi to Aaron and his sons ... "to do the work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting."

In other words God set apart, that is, He sanctified, those of the Levites to be dedicated to the service in the tabernacle.

Numbers 8:19 "And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting, and to make atonement for the children of Israel, that there be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come near the sanctuary."

Numbers 8:21-22 And the Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes; then Aaron presented them, like a wave offering before the LORD, and Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them. After that the Levites went in to do their work in the tabernacle of meeting before Aaron and his sons; as the LORD commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them.

The Levites were commanded to do service before the Lord in the tabernacle and carried on into the temple. Note they are sanctified, set apart from the age of twenty-five until age fifty; twenty-five years in all for their time of service:

Numbers 8:24-25 “This is what pertains to the Levites: From twenty-five years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meeting; and at the age of fifty years they must cease performing this work, and shall work no more.”

It should also be noted that the Levites were given for this service as a gift from God in lieu of all the first-born of Israel:

Numbers 8:16-17 “For they are wholly given to Me from among the children of Israel; I have taken them for Myself instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the children of Israel. For all the firstborn among the children of Israel are Mine, both man and beast; on the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them to Myself.”

How does this *gift* given by God to Israel apply to us?

I believe that principles of God are consistent throughout His Word. This principle of setting aside a people for God’s own purpose is one that is carried forward into the New Covenant, our time:

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Just as the first-born of Israel were spared in Egypt by the applying of a lamb’s blood to their homes, we also are spared from eternal death through a like obedience in faith to obtain mercy through Christ’s blood sacrifice. It is also particularly poignant to note that the blood was applied in Egypt by them being obedient to that command of God.

Exodus 12:22-23 “And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you.”

Hebrews 9:13-14 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Note the last part of this reference in **Hebrews**: “... cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

We have been cleansed, set apart, like the Levites to do service to “the living God.”

Hebrews 10:21-22 and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. See *also* **1 Corinthians 6:11**.

There is another **gift** mentioned in the New Testament, and that is the “gift of the Holy Spirit”:

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus spoke of a “gift of God” to the Samaritan woman at the well:

John 4:9-10 Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”

Is the “gift of God” “living water,” and is the “gift of the Holy Spirit” one and the same?

Romans 6:22-23 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Corinthians 2:11-12 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

Many gifts were promised and given to the apostles, the chosen of Jesus to bring the message of reconciliation of man to God: the Good News.

These gifts were also given to a select few in order to establish that the Word of God was from God:

Matthew 10:1 And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.

Acts 1:8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

1 Timothy 4:14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.

It is evident that the gift or gifts of the Holy Spirit are many and different. Each gift or gifts has been given for a purpose. Some were given to imbue the Apostles and those they laid their hands on, to perform miracles of healing and the removing of demons. Jesus also told them that they, the Apostles, would be given the things they needed to teach the truth.

John 16:13 “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”

Whatever the gifts or gift, it was supernatural in nature. It was above and beyond the natural world.

One gift of the Holy Spirit continues today. The gift of revelation through the written word passed down to us today. It speaks to open and receptive hearts, and with prayer allows the reader to understand the richness of God’s revelation to man.

The promises which were spoken through chosen men of by God are for all time. That is, there is no end to them. There is however a culmination; a fulfillment:

Acts 1:11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Acts 17:30-31 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 ... and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Revelation 2:10 "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Revelation 7:15-17 "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Revelation 20:12-14 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Revelation 21:3-5 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

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