

DOES GOD KEEP HIS PROMISES?

ROMANS 3:1–4

INTRODUCTION

Does God keep His promises?

That sounds like a simple question, but the answer has **profound implications for our faith.**

If God is not true to His Word, then we have no certainty in our hope of salvation.

The gospel, of course, is itself a promise which God kept by sending His Son, as Paul wrote in **Romans 1:1-3**—

- 1 **Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, having been set apart for the gospel of God,**
- 2 **which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,**
- 3 **concerning His Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh**

But much of what is promised in the gospel has yet to be fulfilled, so that as we wait for its future fulfilment the certainty of our hope is based on God's character as true and faithful.

If God is true to His Word and keeps His promises, then we can have confidence and certainty—hope.

But if God is a liar who breaks His promises, then not only is our faith uncertain but our hope is foolish.

On a human level, we understand how important it is to keep our promises—it's foundational to successful relationships and an orderly society.

The basic building block of society—marriage and family—is based on a promise/ covenant.

Benjamin B. Warfield was a world-renowned theologian who taught at Princeton Seminary for almost 34 years until his death on February 16, 1921. Many people are aware of his famous books, like *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*.

But what most people don't know is that in **1876**, at the age of twenty-five, **he married Annie Pierce Kinkead** and took a honeymoon to Germany. During a fierce storm Annie was struck by lightning and permanently paralysed.

After **caring for her for thirty-nine years** Warfield laid her to rest in **1915**. Because of her extraordinary needs, Warfield seldom left his home for more than two hours at a time during all those years of marriage.¹

Matthew 5:33-37

³³ **“Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfil your vows to the Lord.’**

³⁴ **But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,**

³⁵ **or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.**

¹ John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1995), 176.

36 **Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.**

37 **But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of the evil one.**

Psalm 15:1-4

1 **O Yahweh, who may sojourn in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain?**

2 **He who walks blamelessly, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart.**

4 **[...] He swears to his own hurt and does not change**

If it is so important on a human level to be true to your word and faithful to keep your promises, then how much more important is it that God not be a liar or a promise breaker.

Scripture presents God as faithful and true.

Deuteronomy 7:9

You shall know therefore that Yahweh your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments

That is precisely the point that Paul reaffirms in **Romans 3:1-4**.

In order to understand why might have been asking the question, we need to remember the flow of Paul's argument in his letter thus far.

In **1:1–16**, we're introduced to the man, the [apostolic] ministry, and the [gospel] message.

The introduction climaxes with **verses 16–17** which present the theme of the entire letter—

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous will live by faith.”

After introducing the good news of the gospel, Paul reminds his readers of the corresponding bad news.

Universal need of the gospel:

- Pagans (**1:18–32**)
- Moralists/ self-righteous, religious “good people” (**2:1–16**)
- Jews (**17–29**)

Jews who rejected the gospel had two false hopes:

- They possessed the Torah (**2:17–24**).
- They practiced circumcision (**2:25–29**).

Paul corrected:

- Being taught the Torah, even being able to teach others the Torah, is worthless if you do not practice the Torah.
- Practicing the external ritual of circumcision is worthless if it does not represent an internal spiritual reality of a circumcised heart/ regeneration.

It's at this point that Paul anticipates the objection he had probably heard a thousand times before—if God rejects Israel, doesn't that make Him a liar?

As Paul responds, he corrects his opponent by clarifying that God has neither rejected Israel nor lied by being untrue to His covenants.

God **DOES** keep His promises, but that does not mean that someone can reject the gospel in unbelief and still be saved.

2 Timothy 2:11-14

¹¹ **It is a trustworthy saying: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him;**

¹² **If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we will deny Him, He also will deny us;**

¹³ **If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.**

It is precisely **BECAUSE** God keeps His promises that we put our faith in Him.

PROPOSITION

Paul provides us with **two reasons to put our faith in God** to **keep His gospel promise** to save us from His wrath in the final judgment:

1. **God is faithful to His people (1-2)**
2. **God is faithful to His promises (3-4)**

Because God is true to His Word and keeps His promises, we can have **confidence and certainty in our future salvation.**

1. GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS PEOPLE (1-2)

As Paul argued in **chapter two**, God will judge Jews impartially alongside Gentiles on the final day.

But that does not mean that God is unfaithful to His Word or that there is actually no advantage in being a Jew.

¹ Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?

Paul didn't deny that the Jewish people are God's unique, covenant people.

They do enjoy privileges/ blessings

Romans 2:25, “**For indeed circumcision is of value** [saving advantage] **if you practice the Law...**”

Not salvation by works, but obedience as covenant love

God's faithfulness to His covenant people Israel is such an important topic that Paul will return to it in detail in **chapters 9-11**.

In order to understand God's faithfulness to His people Israel, we have to understand the **nature of that relationship**.

God chose Israel to be a unique/ special people—

Deuteronomy 10:14-15

14 Behold, to Yahweh your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it.

15 Yet on your fathers did Yahweh set His affection to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day.

Deuteronomy 14:2

For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God, and Yahweh has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Psalm 135:4

For Yah has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His treasured possession.

Therefore, God remained faithful to Israel and would never reject them as His people—

Isaiah 41:8-9

⁸ “But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, Seed of Abraham My friend,

⁹ You whom I have strongly taken hold of from the ends of the earth, And called from its remotest parts And said to you, ‘You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you.

Psalm 94:14

For Yahweh will not abandon His people, Nor will He forsake His inheritance.

Isaiah 49:14-15

14 But Zion said, “Yahweh has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me.”

15 “Can a woman forget her infant And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.

Jeremiah 31:35-37

35 Thus says Yahweh, Who gives the sun for light by day And the statutes for the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; Yahweh of hosts is His name:

36 “If these statutes are removed From before Me,” declares Yahweh, “Then the seed of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever.”

37 Thus says Yahweh, “If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also reject all the seed of Israel For all that they have done,” declares Yahweh.

God’s faithfulness to His people is not based on their faithfulness to Him, but on His faithfulness.

He is committed to His choice and unwavering in His covenant love—

1 Samuel 12:22

For Yahweh will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because Yahweh has been pleased to make you a people for Himself.

² Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

Great advantages—

Romans 9:3-5

³ **For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh,**

⁴ **who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,**

⁵ **whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.**

Oracles/ OT Scriptures—

Deuteronomy 6:1-2

¹ **“Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments, which Yahweh your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do it in the land where you are going over to possess it,**

² **so that you and your son and your grandson might fear Yahweh your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I am commanding you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.**

ORDER matters—Oracles were a **means of relationship**—

By means of the Torah/ OT Scriptures, the Jews could know God

Exodus 19:3-6

³ **Now Moses went up to God, and Yahweh called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel:**

⁴ **‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I lifted you up on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.**

⁵ **So now then, if you will indeed listen to My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine;**

⁶ **and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”**

Error of the unbelieving Jews—

John 5:39

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that bear witness about Me

Conclusion: God has not rejected His people—

Romans 11:1

I say then, has God rejected His people? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

ILLUSTRATION:

Our children are so confident in our love for them that the idea of us rejecting them and refusing to care for them by feeding and clothing them has never even entered their minds.

It's why their requests can sometimes be very bold...

They know we are committed to them and are faithful to love them...

APPLICATION:

If God is not faithful to His unique, covenant people Israel then what hope do we have as gentiles?

But God did not reject Israel...

2. GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISES (3–4)

Oracles/ OT Scriptures had a particular focus on the promises of salvation, as we see in **verse 3**—

3 What then? If some did not believe, does their unbelief abolish the faithfulness of God?

God is not like a **fickle husband** who breaks his covenant/promises—

Hosea 2:19-20

19 And I will betroth you to Me forever; Indeed, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, In lovingkindness and in compassion,

20 And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know Yahweh.

In order to understand God's faithfulness to His people Israel, we have to understand the **nature of those promises**.

What is **NEW** about the **NEW COVENANT**?

Jeremiah 31:31-34

31 "Behold, days are coming," declares Yahweh, "when I will cut a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

32 not like the covenant which I cut with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, but I was a husband to them," declares Yahweh.

³³ **“But this is the covenant which I will cut with the house of Israel after those days,” declares Yahweh: “I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.**

³⁴ **And they will not teach again, each man his neighbour and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know Yahweh,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares Yahweh, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”**

Same **regeneration**—Jesus and Nicodemus in **John 3**

Same work of the Spirit to produce **faith**—**Ephesians 2:8**

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God

Same work of the Spirit to produce **obedience**—**Philippians 2:12–13**

¹² **So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;**

¹³ **for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**

Deuteronomy 10:16

So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer.

Deuteronomy 30:6

Moreover Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.

Confirmation in Paul's later elaboration—

Romans 9:6

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel

Even though God has promised salvation to the Jews, no individual Jew should presume upon those promises and think their salvation is guaranteed.

⁴ May it never be! Rather, let God be true and every man a liar, as it is written, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND OVERCOME WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."

It is a basic truth that God keeps His word, and this is true even if it implies that everyone else must be considered a liar.

Psalms 51:4

Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And pure when You judge.

Revelation 19:11

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sits on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

APPLICATION:

Reformed/ Covenant theology has a fatal flaw to its understanding of God's relationship with the nation of Israel.

The inescapable implication of God replacing Israel with the church is that He is a liar who breaks His promises by rejecting His people.

Since God is faithful to His promises to Israel, we can be confident that He will keep His promises to us in the gospel.

Titus 1:1-2

¹ Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of God's elect and the full knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness,

² in the hope of eternal life, which the God who cannot lie promised from all eternity

Hebrews 6:13-18

¹³ For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,

¹⁴ saying, "I will greatly bless you and I will greatly multiply you."

15 And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.

16 For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.

17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, guaranteed it with an oath,

18 so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

Hebrews 10:23

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

CONCLUSION

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4. **God is faithful to His promises (3–4)**

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Every Promise of Your Word (Keith Getty and Stuart Townend):

*From the breaking of the dawn to the setting of the sun
I will stand on ev'ry promise of Your Word
Words of power, strong to save, that will never pass away
I will stand on ev'ry promise of Your Word
For Your covenant is sure
And on this I am secure
I can stand on ev'ry promise of Your Word*

BENEDICTION

*Now may Yahweh,
Creator of heaven and earth,
the keeper of Israel and your keeper,
keep your going out and your coming in
from now on and for all time.
Amen.²*

² Dale Ralph Davis, *Grace Be with You: Benedictions from Dale Ralph Davis*, New Edition (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 20.