

The Promise And The Oath

[Part One]

Hebrews 6:18 [NIV] *“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.”*

What are the “two unchangeable things?”

Hebrews 6:18 [Living Bible] *“God has given us both His Promise and His Oath, two things we can completely count on, for it is impossible for God to tell a lie. Now all those who flee to Him to save them can take new courage when they hear such assurances from God, now they can know without doubt that He will give them the salvation He has promised them.”*

The whole purpose of this study is to give us all “new courage” and “assurance”.

Hebrews 6:19-20 [Living Bible] *“This certain hope of being saved is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls, connecting us with God Himself behind the sacred curtains of Heaven where Christ has gone ahead to plead for us from His position as our High Priest, with the honour and rank of Melchizedek.”*

Let us define these two words!

Promise – a declaration that one will do or not do a certain thing. When God gives a promise we know it will be true. Why then do we need an oath?

Oath – a solemn declaration by swearing that one will do or not do a certain thing.

The context of the promise and the oath are the same; the oath is given when we feel the person receiving the promise is not totally persuaded what we are saying is true. When we give an oath we raise our hand and swear on something greater than ourselves, usually the Christian Bible.

God deals with humanity on these two levels, the promise and the oath.

There are times that God swears an oath in the Christian Bible and we don't find the word oath, but it is indicated by other expressions like *“uplifted hand”*.

The oath adds weight to the promise or ends the argument.

The two levels of communication are the ordinary, the promises, and the extraordinary, the oath.

The ordinary way, the promises of God, is what we live by on a day to day basis. This is the way we are converted by God.

The greatest of these promises is:

John 3:16 [NIV] *“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.”*

The oath is something that doesn't happen very often and is generally linked with some major event in our lives. It is a way of God preparing us for that event.

When God does give us an oath we will know it is happening and receive the full assurance that God wants us to have.

God did this with Abraham but it only happened after the promise was given and renewed many times in Abraham's life.

Genesis 22:15-18 [NIV] *"The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."*

This was after Abraham had shown he was willing to sacrifice Isaac his only son through whom all the promises were going to be fulfilled.

What is the purpose of this study?

- a) That we grasp the difference between the promise and the oath.
- b) To see in what ways the promise and oath are similar in content.
- c) To understand Bible language that indicate a promise or an oath.
- d) To know how God communicates with us through the promises and oaths.

Why is this study important?

- a) It introduces us to terms that are so often used in the Christian Bible indicating a promise or oath. To swear, raise your hand, vow, etc.
- b) Brings us face to face with the way God communicates to His people and helps us to recognise God's voice.
- c) It is designed to make God more real to us as we understand how He speaks to us through His promises and oaths.

God speaks to us by promise before He ever speaks to us through an oath.

This is the way it was with Abraham. Abraham had to live by renewed promises for many years before God spoke to him by an oath.

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

Genesis 12:7 [NIV] *"The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him."*

Genesis 13:15-16 [NIV] *"All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted."*

Genesis 15:1 [NIV] *"After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."*

Genesis 15:5 [NIV] *"He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."*

Genesis 15:6 [NIV] *"Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."*

This is the first time it is recorded that Abraham believed what God promised. This is the basis of the doctrine of justification by faith. Paul when he introduced this doctrine to Jewish Christians showed them that it was not new but based on God's relationship with Abraham.

Paul established the fact that when we believe what God promises He credits to us the righteousness of Christ.

We become perfectly righteous as though we had never sinned, this is the gospel promise The Good News we have been charged by God to bring to this ignorant world, who are blinded to it by Satan.

When we trust in what Jesus has done for us through His perfect sin-free life and His death on the cross we become righteous in God's eyes, fit to be the dwelling place for the Holy Spirit.

Abraham was justified, made righteous **not** because he believed the oath, he knew nothing of that at this time, but because he believed God's promise.

We are saved in the same way by our belief in God's promise.

Because of our weak nature we need the renewal of this promise and Abraham was no different.

God continued to renew, re-state, this same promise to Abraham.

Genesis 15:7-8 [NIV] *"He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"*

Abraham believed the promise yet still had doubts as to how it would be fulfilled.

Genesis 15:13 [NIV] *"Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years."*

God re-stated the same promise to build up Abraham's faith.

Mark 9:24 [NIV] *"Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

Belief and doubt are possible at the same time, Jesus did not rebuke this man but acted to build up his faith by healing his son. God will do the same for us when He sees the need.

Genesis 15:18 [NIV] *"On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates..."*

Promise renewed.

Genesis 17:2 [NIV] *"I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."*

Promise renewed.

Genesis 17:6-7 [NIV] *"I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. 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."*

Promise renewed.

Genesis 17:15-16 [NIV] *“God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”*”

Promise renewed.

Genesis 18:18 [NIV] *“Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.”*

Promise renewed.

Genesis 21:12 [NIV] *“But God said to him, “Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”*”

Promise renewed.

Genesis 22:15-18 [NIV] *“The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”*”

The oath is added to the renewed promised.

The New Testament has many promises that God has made to New Covenant Christians.

John 3:16 [NIV] *“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.”*

The promise of eternal life.

Matthew 7:7-8 [NIV] *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

The promise of answered prayer.

Luke 11:13 [NIV] *“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*

The promise of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 4:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.”*

The promise of entering God’s rest.

Genesis 2:2 [NIV] *“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.”*

God entered into a rest by stopping His own works on the seventh day.

Hebrews 4:10 [NIV] *“...for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.”*

Ephesians 2:8-9 [NIV] *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

We are saved by faith not by our works. We enter into our rest by accepting and believing in the work God has done for us through Christ our Creator.

Ephesians 2:10 [NIV] *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

We are the result of God’s work in us, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 4:19 [NIV] *“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”*

Promise of God supplying all our needs.

What is the purpose of the oath?

If the promise is true why do we need an oath?

The promise is enough for this is all we usually are given to live by.

a) The oath makes the promise more believable and God knows that there are times when we need this addition to the promise.

On the human level the swearing of an oath is a common thing.

Matthew 5:34-37 [NIV] *“But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”*

Jesus tells us not to take an oath as there should be enough trust between Christians for there to be no need of an oath.

The reason behind an oath is that we don’t take the other person’s promise seriously enough.

b) The oath also makes the promise totally binding.

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

Puts an end to any discussion as to the validity of the promise. Ends the doubt. God condescends to our weakness when He adds an oath to the promise He makes.

c) The oath makes God Himself more real to us. God does this by putting a “seal” on something that is going on.

Genesis 9:12-17 [NIV] *“And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.” So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”*

The rainbow was the “*sign*” or “*seal*” that God put on His promise not to bring a flood on the earth ever again.

Why does God give this oath at times?

a) God gives an oath to reward our faith

Genesis 22:9-12 [NIV] *“When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”*”

It was after the great trial of faith that God gave Abraham the oath.

It appears that God gives the oath to those whom He is already sure that they will remain faithful whatever trial they may face.

A promise needs faith to live by, the oath needs little if any faith.

Hebrews 11:1 [NIV] *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*

Faith is believing the promise without the sight that the oath brings.

Hebrews 11:6 [NIV] *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”*

Without faith we cannot please God, so God very seldom gives us the oath because with the oath we would not need faith as we do with the promise.

Abraham was pleasing God all the years that He believed what God promised before and without the oath.

b) An oath leaves us with a very high level of faith, because we are absolutely sure of the promise God has made.

The promise only needs a little faith in a great Saviour and God.

The oath leave us with no doubt, great faith in what God has promised.

c) An oath may be given to prepare us for the long haul ahead or some great trial.

This may not happen very often, but when God does give such an oath it is for very good reasons. We are going to need that extra confidence in our God to come through the period of trial.

It may proceed a time of God seemingly hiding His face from us to test our loyalty.

It may proceed a time of great physical suffering.

The giving of the oath may be part of God preparing us for some great thing He wishes to do using us or through us.

d) The oath is given sometimes to alert us to what God is about to perform.

Revelation 10:6 [NIV] *“And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, “There will be no more delay!”*”

The oath preceded the time of God’s personal intervention in this world’s affairs.

e) Full assurance, oath-like assurance can be given by God in relationship to doctrine.

Colossians 2:2-4 [NIV] *“My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.”*

When we are so assured on some point of doctrine that no-one can cause us to doubt.

But to use such oath-like assurance to abuse others’ lack of such assurance would make God very angry and we would lose the anointing that brought this full assurance.

God’s oath can come with either mercy or wrath.

The only promises and oaths I have referred to is those that come with mercy. God also makes just as binding promises and oaths that are His dealing with mankind in His wrath.

Numbers 14:28-33 [NIV] *“So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: In this desert your bodies will fall, every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. But you, your bodies will fall in this desert. Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert.”*

“As sure as I live” – an oath.

Psalms 95:11 [NIV] *“So I declared on oath in my anger, “They shall never enter my rest.”*

Referring to our forefathers who did not believe the promises God had made.

Promises are often conditional while the oath is without conditions, unchangeable.