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God Remembers His Covenant Forever

**God's
Faithfulness
in His
Promises
to Israel
and to Us.**

by Mark Bailey

DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER




Dr. Mark L. Bailey

Dr. Mark Bailey has served in a number of key positions at Dallas Theological Seminary. Following his student days, he became professor of Bible Exposition, vice president for academic affairs, academic dean, and provost before he accepted his role as the school's fifth president.

He earned his bachelor's degree from Southwestern College in Phoenix, two master's degrees from Western Conservative Baptist Seminary in Portland, and his doctorate from Dallas Seminary. Within the past 12 years, he has authored *To Follow Him: The Seven Marks of a Disciple* (Multnomah, 1997) and co-authored *Nelson's New Testament Survey* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999).

Theological education and pastoral ministry have been Dr. Bailey's career passions. While teaching and holding administrative roles at Dallas Seminary, he was also the senior pastor at Faith Bible Church in DeSoto, Texas, from 1994 to 2000.

Dr. Bailey has guided tours to Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, and Rome and has served in missions in Argentina, Venezuela, and Hungary. He and his wife, Barbara, have two sons, Joshua, who is married to Emily, and Jeremy. They also have two grandchildren, Fiona and Gavin.

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Dallas Seminary president Dr. Mark Bailey led a group of Seminary friends and supporters in a study of the Bible's covenants during a retreat at the T Bar M Ranch in New Braunfels, Texas. This message is an excerpt from that series—a study of God's promise to His people as revealed in His covenant to the great patriarch, Abraham. Dr. Bailey reminds us in this encouraging message that we can trust God today and tomorrow because He has always been faithful to His promises.

There was a little chorus we used to sing when I was a child in Sunday school. Perhaps you'll recognize it: "Every Promise in the Book Is Mine." The second line said, "Every chapter, every verse, every line."

That's a cute song, but I'm afraid it's not really accurate theology. Every promise in God's Word was not made to me. For instance, God never promised me, as He did Abraham, that I would have as many children as the stars of the sky or the sand of the sea. Thank goodness, considering how much it cost just to get my two sons through college!

But we need not despair that "every promise in the Book" was not given to us directly. The Abrahamic Covenant contains promises that were personal to Abraham, specific to the nation of Israel, and those that extend through the blessing of Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham, to the entire world.

There are some who believe the promises to Abraham, and especially the promise of the land of Canaan as a permanent possession for Israel, have been canceled or forfeited because of Israel's failure. However, if God does not keep His Word to Israel with reference to His promises recorded in the Old Testament, how do we know that God will keep His promises recorded in the New Testament that

are addressed to us as believers in Jesus Christ? If even one of God's promises has ever failed, then maybe He won't keep His promise to us about giving us eternal life. You might think I am overstating the implications, but wait until you see a passage I want to show you later in the Book of Hebrews.



All or Nothing

It can't be both ways. Either all of God's promises are unfailing,

or we cannot depend on any of them. It's either all or nothing—and thank God, it's all!

God was delighted to take the responsibility of covenant-making upon Himself. When the covenant with Abraham was made, Abraham was put to sleep

while God's presence, described as a flaming torch, passed between the two rows of animal sacrifices, thus indicating that the Abrahamic Covenant was unilateral and unconditional. This means that the covenant promises were guaranteed by the promise of God alone. What is interesting is that the covenant was given in response to Abraham's question, "LORD God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it [the land of Canaan]?" (Genesis 15:8, KJV)

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Genesis 15 makes all of this unmistakably clear. Abraham did not make a covenant with God; *God made a covenant with Abraham!* God did not lay down any conditions for Abraham to meet. In fact, when the covenant was made by God, *Abraham was asleep* (Gen. 15:12–18)! It was a covenant of grace: God made promises to Abraham; Abraham did not make reciprocal promises to God. God alone passed between the two halves of the sacrifice that Abraham had prepared.

Covenant Confirmations

The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant were not only confirmed by the births of Isaac and Jacob and his sons, but those promises were actually repeated in their original specificity. Even in spite of the failures and blunders of those early patriarchs, God reaffirmed His promises to each generation.

We can fast-forward to the time of Moses in the Book of Exodus. It's easy to forget that part of the Lord's address to Abraham during the covenant ratification in Genesis 15 was a prophecy that the people of Israel would one day be driven from their land into captivity and would be brought back to the land He had promised to Abraham and his descendants. This is seen to be true for the patriarchs and their families at the time of the Exodus and conquest. Moses also predicted future captivities, exiles, and returns of the people to their land, which would take place in the end times (Deut. 4:25–31, 30:1–10).

Even though Israel sinned so blatantly, God did not fail Israel or destroy her, but He forgave her and brought her back to the land in faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant.

Much later, David affirmed this as he celebrated the bringing of the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem: “He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant” (1 Chron. 16:15–17).

Let's advance to Jeremiah 23, which was written during the divided kingdom period, right before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Despite the coming destruction and Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah promised the people of Israel that the Abrahamic Covenant would be fulfilled:

“So then, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when people will no longer say, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,’ but they will say, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.’ Then they will live in their own land” (Jer. 23:7–8).

The Abrahamic promise, including the land promised to Israel, was not canceled even though Israel and Judah had degenerated into spiritual adultery and idolatry. Whether they prophesied before the Babylonian exile, during the exile, or in the post-exilic period, many of the prophets could be cited to show this faithfulness of God to keep His covenant promise to Abraham and his descendants.

Jesus' Coming

There are many more Scriptures we could examine, but I want to again fast-forward to the declaration the priest Zechariah made in the announcement of the birth of his son, John the Baptist, who would prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus.

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David . . . salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham” (Luke 1:68–73).

According to this passage, the very fact that God sent John to introduce Jesus is in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. You will notice the combination of the terms *covenant* and *oath*. You will see it again in our Hebrews passage in our conclusion.

The angel Gabriel also said to Mary, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will

give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever” (Luke 1:30–33). The Davidic Covenant is the outworking of the Abrahamic promises to provide the seed through whom the blessing would come. The terms *throne*, *house*, and *kingdom* anticipate the Ruler, His reign, and the realm over which He will rule to be linked with Israel and the eternal future.

God revealed that the offspring of Mary, Jesus the Messiah, is going to reign over Israel on a throne in a kingdom that will never have an end. That will be the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. If God has kept every promise to this point in history, then I believe He will also fulfill all of His promises in the future with the same degree of faithfulness and exactness we can observe with those already fulfilled.

May I mention one more passage before we conclude with Hebrews? According to Peter’s speech to the Jews

in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 3, even though Israel committed the ultimate sin of crucifying the Son of God, Jesus her Messiah, the apostle Peter identified the very Jews who had rejected Christ as children, or the intended heirs, of the Abrahamic Covenant. The appeal was still being extended to these he describes as wicked on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant (Acts 3:12–15, 25, 26). The Abrahamic Covenant wasn’t canceled by

the history of failure, which called for the exile of Israel, nor even by Israel’s rejection of the Messiah at His first coming. How gracious is His faithful and loyal love!

**Jesus will reign
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That will be the
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Applying the Truth

I want to finish this message in Hebrews 6—which on first reading may seem like an unusual way to finish a study of the Abrahamic Covenant. But walk with me through this amazing chapter of Scripture as we turn the focus on today and how the truth of God’s unfailing promises to Abraham can strengthen and encourage us in our walk with Christ.

The writer of Hebrews opened chapter 6 with a strong exhortation to the Hebrews, who were wavering between following Christ and returning to Judaism, to move forward decisively in their faith because there it was impossible for them to turn back (vv. 1–8).

I find it fascinating that the writer to the Hebrews—and don’t miss the fact that these readers are Jewish people—makes three challenging applications based on the unconditionality and integrity of fulfillment in the Abrahamic Covenant. To a group of Jews living in the generation following the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, that covenant continues to be an unshakable promise when he states in Hebrews 6:17–18: “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” (italics mine).

First, the unchangeable purpose of a promise affirmed by an oath forms the foundation on which the writer to the Hebrews challenges his readers to work and love with diligence in order to realize the benefits of our hope (Heb. 6:10–11).



Second, it is the same Abrahamic Covenant that formed the encouragement to imitate the faith of those who are waiting with patience to inherit the promises.

A third application provides the motivation to hope with endurance because our hope is fixed steadfast and sure on Jesus Christ, who is the anchor to our soul.

I have read that in the ancient world when a ship would come into port, a smaller ship would go out to meet the larger vessel and carry the anchor in to the harbor so that it could be secured to the dock. The larger ship would then draw in the anchor, which would have the effect of drawing the ship into port where it could be docked for loading and unloading purposes. In this passage of Hebrews 6, the illustration is that Jesus is the anchor of our soul, who has entered into the very presence of God within the veil as a forerunner for us, interceding for us in His role before the Father. The fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant in the person of Jesus Christ is what prompts our diligence, our patience, and our endurance in our walk with Christ.

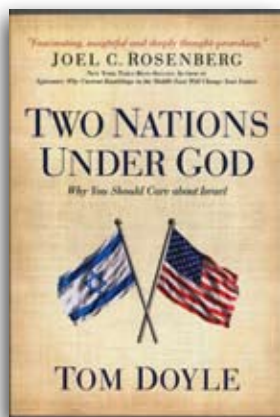
Our Secure Anchor

My friend, you can have hope today because God says He will keep His unfailing Word. Abraham got exactly what God promised to him, and he is actually even going to get more because Jesus said that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be resurrected to sit at the table in the kingdom of God with all who have faith in Christ.

This is our hope too, one that is an anchor for our souls regardless of how much these turbulent times toss us about. Where is our anchor? Where is it secured? It's in the presence of God, which is where His promises to us are also secured!

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What a Great, Promise-Keeping God We Serve!

I wish I could say I have kept every promise I ever made, but it simply isn't true. At least I have plenty of company, for no human being can say that he or she always keeps their promises.

How different it is with our great God! I love the ringing declaration the apostle Paul made when he wrote: "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Cor. 1:20). Praise the Lord for His faithfulness!

I can tell you with great confidence that we are constantly seeing the outworking of God's faithfulness in the life of Dallas Theological Seminary. Of the many examples I could cite, the one that comes readily to mind involves our students.

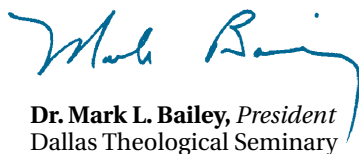
I could tell you many stories of the sacrifices that our students make to leave all else and come here to prepare themselves for ministry.

If you were to ask DTS students why they are able to make these sacrifices, one after another will tell you that they are relying on the faithfulness of God to keep His promises and provide for their needs as they leave all else to follow Him.

You also, my friend, are part of the story of God's faithfulness to Dallas Seminary—for the way that God often proves His faithfulness to our students is by moving the hearts of generous ministry partners like you to meet the needs of this work.

Your commitment is exemplary—and we could not be more grateful to you! One way we have of thanking you is to send you *Veritas* as a way of encouraging you as you follow Christ.

Our desire to help you grow in Christ is sincere. Your prayers and financial gifts to Dallas Seminary enable us to prepare godly leaders in this generation and for the next. We continue to rely on your commitment—and we continue to thank God for you daily!



Dr. Mark L. Bailey, *President*
Dallas Theological Seminary

