



The Difference Between a Promise and a Covenant

By Gerald Cumby

A promise is defined as “a declaration assuring that one will or will not do something” (Webster dictionary). It can be a vow or a pledge from an individual or group/team to a person or a group/team of individuals. A covenant, in turn, is defined as “a binding agreement made by two or more persons or parties; compact” (Webster dictionary). We know that promises and covenants can be broken by any or both parties (the giver or the receiver). When that promise or covenant is broken by one or both parties it is evident that man has failed again.

However, we also know that although man has failed to keep promises or covenants over and over again throughout history, God has never failed nor ever will fail to keep His commitment or “His end of the bargain” with mankind (to an individual or group). God keeps His promise(s) and will always fulfill His covenant(s) with man. This is the thread that runs throughout the Word of God, both the Old and New Testament; God’s plan for redemption of mankind is established and God will not break from that covenant and promise. Although one covenant might replace another with God, God still honors every covenant made with His creation.

I think the difference between a covenant and a promise is that a promise can be made by one party without response on the other end (the promiser to the promisee) while a covenant is established between both parties.

The promise by God will always be available and open to mankind. God is always open to fulfilling His promise. However, man, because of free-will, can refuse to accept the promise.

A covenant, as mentioned above, is between both parties. For instance, God made a covenant with Abraham. God fulfilled the covenant and Abraham did as God asked him to do; he left his country. Although God unconditionally made this covenant with Abraham (once ratified, it was not dependant upon anyone other than God, who instituted no conditions which could negate the promises He made), it did hinge initially upon Abraham's obedience to the imperative "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house to the land which I will show you." It basically depended on Abraham to set the covenant in motion because God had already established His commitment to Abraham. Abraham did as God had told him, and the covenant was set in motion. We also know that the children of Abraham made a covenant with Jehovah God and agreed to abide with God's statutes (Exodus 24:7) but man failed over and over again to keep their commitment. However, God's covenant was and is everlasting and He will fulfill His promise. This thread of a covenant-keeping God is woven throughout God's Word.

There can be many promises established in a covenant. For instance, in the Abrahamic Covenant there are seven (7) specific promises made by God. The seven promises are:

- 1. I will make you a great nation***
- 2. I will bless you***
- 3. [I will] make your name great***
- 4. You shall be a blessing***
- 5. I will bless those who bless you***
- 6. The one who curses you I will curse***
- 7. In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.***

I thank God for the promise to keep His Word. His mercy endures forever.