

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Bible Promises:

The Creation Promises: Genesis 2: 1-3, Genesis 2: 15-17, Genesis 2: 18-25, Genesis 3: 14-19, Genesis 4: 11-15.

Suggestion: If you can make the time, read the passages highlighted, and jot down briefly in your own words what the promises are. If you can read more than one version, so much the better; but while the way the promises are expressed of course varies, the essential content of the promises does not change.

Background Note: Some Bible promises might reasonably be seen as a record of what God said, or inspired someone to say, at a particular point in time – even though it is a bit unlikely that someone was there at the time with a tape recorder or a short-hand notebook to capture the precise wording. (Even the most ardent Bible literalist would be more likely to claim that the person who in the fullness of time wrote down/edited the promise was divinely inspired to know what had been said.) Genesis is an edited collection of material collected over about 1500 years, first being captured in something like its present form after the Babylonian Exile. The earliest part of Genesis relates to time periods many millions of years earlier, long before there were humans to register let alone record God promises. So we are talking about people, divinely inspired, interpreting God's intentions: "The God I know would have said something like this..."

Looking for certainty?: I've been writing records of meetings for about 65 years, and I write what I think I heard, tempered by what I think the speaker meant to say, by what I think is important, and by how I think I can make the important things the speaker meant to say intelligible to the future reader. It isn't impossible that what I heard and recorded was influenced by what I expected to hear/wanted to hear. Some belief systems do claim that their starting point was a text actually dictated, even written, word by word by God. (Sadly none of those originals still exists.) Our Anglican 39 Articles talk about scripture being "inspired" by God, not "written" by God. For me, the Bible literalist is not sufficiently coming to terms with Bible statements that God wanted every man, woman and child in some community slaughtered. If that were literally true, I could easily become an atheist – as indeed many have.

Genesis 2: 1-3: The Jewish/Christian universe is purposeful God creation, not godless accident without purpose. The purpose? Our place in it? Science underlines the message in other parts of the Bible that the work of Creation is on-going; and confirms the message of the next Bible Promise about our partnership with God. Every partnership involves promises. What about the Sabbath as special promise? Do we see this passage as nice story or powerful teaching?

Genesis 2: 15-17: Promise and/or threat?

Genesis 2: 18-25: Promises and responsibilities. Name-giving traditionally means not just defining something/someone, but also exercising control over. The promises between/ mutual responsibilities of man and woman? Does the current gender identity debate/ reality undermine all this, or enrich it?

Genesis 3: 14-19: Promises/threats about relationships and experience. A profound reality, or a not too convincing attempt to explain why having a baby hurts, why work is often hard, and why women in particular tend to dislike snakes? What is so wrong with knowing good and evil? Mortality replaces immortality: Is death a promise or a threat?

Genesis 4: 11-15: Cain, as elder son, inherits his father's horticultural responsibilities; but pollutes the soil by murder and then builds a city – concrete replacing nature. How to balance concrete and grass? How to avenge murder without murdering and so creating another prompt to vengeance.? Do we have a contract with (promises to) nature? What does the civil contract (promise) mean?