

## **Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Bible Promises: A first note**

When we are reading a Bible book, the ground rules are fairly clear-cut. We read the whole book in sequence. We try to establish who wrote the book, when, for whom and (perhaps) why. When working on themes rather than books, the options (and uncertainties) are more numerous. Taking our first theme, Bible Promises: How do we choose among the thousands of “promises”? How do we categorise the “promises”? How many promises in the same category do we take on board at any one session? However, there is still a lot to be said for the discipline of asking each time: To whom? From whom? When? Why? About What? And, of course: Does this apply to me, and if so how? (Some of us are really not going to have descendants as numerous as the grains of sand on the shore or the stars in the sky! And it is perhaps just as well that most of are not going to be able, literally, to walk on water or talk a tree into the sea!)

First, some thinking aloud about PROMISES. Our word “promise” comes from the Latin verb *promitto* (*promisi, promissum*) – which means much what you would expect; but also: “to let go forward”, “to send forth”, “to grow”, “to let grow”. Think about those alternative meanings. Most of us have made rather a lot of promises in our lives, including the ones we make every Sunday, and maybe, in some form, every day of the week. “See you tomorrow” is a sort of promise. (Or much valued by a lonely person!) Promises in your life that might stand out are as a Baptised person, a Confirmed person, an employed person, as someone with a mortgage or a hire-purchase agreement, as an engaged (?) or married person (or as someone in another form of committed relationship), as a God-parent, as a Trustee. (As a civil servant, I signed the Official Secrets Act declaration – designed to protect State secrets, personal information of members of the public, and the Government.)

Now to Bible Promises. There are a lot of promises named as promises. (You might like to jot down your own short list of promises described as promises – those from God to men and women, those from men and women to God (rashly – think Jephthah – or otherwise), those made by men and women to each other – think Ruth to Naomi.) But there are even more implied promises. God’s own Bible names are promises: I AM WHO I WILL BE, Saviour, Shepherd, etc, etc. Close to the heart of the Old Testament are the Promised Land (obvious) and the Chosen People (implied promise). Some Bible Promises are expressed conditionally: If you will....., I will..... But God’s Love is not infrequently promised unconditionally (and Job returns that supreme compliment in the same way – though He slay me, yet will I trust Him; and the Three Children, about to be burnt alive, do the same.)

Some key Bible promises are not the instant gratification category. Abraham had rather given up on being a dad with the help of his wife by the time he received his telegram from the Queen, and then.....Isaac! King David had a long wait between the promise that he would be king, and the opportunity actually to sit on a fairly secure throne. The promise to David about a future super King was not fulfilled (and then in a largely unexpected form) for many centuries. Jerusalem as a beacon of hope doesn’t look likely any time soon.

## Suggested Outline Programme

**Monday October 29<sup>th</sup>** Time to reflect on Promises in our own lives, and on the making and breaking of promises The responsibilities of God parents The promises made by the congregation to the support of a child they may never see again. Marriage vows. The Guide promise then and now (Look it up!) The Easter renewal of Baptismal vows. (I have no idea why small print and large print change places!)

**Monday November 5<sup>th</sup>** The Creation Promises: Genesis 2: 1-3, Genesis 2: 15-17, Genesis 2: 18-25, Genesis 3: 14-19, Genesis 4: 11-15.

**Monday November 12<sup>th</sup>** The Abraham Promises: Genesis 12: 1-3, Genesis 22 15-18, Genesis 13: 15-16, Genesis 18: 10, 18. Galatians 3:16.

**Monday November 19<sup>th</sup>** The New Start promise to Noah: Genesis 8: 20-23 and Genesis 9: 1-17

**Monday November 26<sup>th</sup>** The promise to Hagar: Genesis 16 and Genesis 21: 1-21

**Monday December 3<sup>rd</sup>** An inter-human Promise: Ruth 1: 6-18

**Monday December 10<sup>th</sup>** Another inter-human Promise and relationship: 1 Samuel 20.

**Monday December 17<sup>th</sup>** The Birth of Jesus: Micah 5.2 (Matthew 2.1, Matthew 2.4-6) Psalm 72.10 (Matthew 2.1-11) Isaiah 7.14 (Matthew 1.22, 23) Psalm 132.11 (Matthew 1.1)

**Monday December 24<sup>th</sup>** Christmas Eve – No meeting

**Monday December 31<sup>st</sup>** New Year Eve – No Meeting

**Monday January 7<sup>th</sup>** Contract and promise: 2 Samuel 22 and 23: 1-7

**Monday January 14<sup>th</sup>** Promises to God: Numbers 30:2, Deuteronomy 23: 21, 23, Psalm 66: 13, 14, Ecclesiastes 5: 4, 5 Genesis 28: 21, 22

**Monday January 21<sup>st</sup>** The Devil and his promises: Genesis 3: 4-5, (2 Corinthians 11:3, 1 Timothy 2: 14, Revelation 12:9) John 13: 27, 28, Ephesians 6:11, Acts 20:29

**Monday January 28<sup>th</sup>** The promise of the Holy Spirit: Joel 2: 28-31, John 14: 16 and 26, Acts 1:4, Acts 2: 39, Ephesians 1: 14