

“GUARANTEES”

The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does (Psalm 145:13).

Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant (Hebrews 7:22).

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 7:22-8:13 ¹

The idea of a guarantee, especially a guaranteed return, seems especially desirable after a week such as this on the stock market, doesn't it? There are, after all, very few genuine guarantees in life . . . but we do try, don't we?

We attempt to guarantee retirement income . . . by investing in the stock market. Oops.

We try to guarantee the welfare of our loved ones with insurance on our lives, homes, and autos, but that doesn't always work out well, either.

Max Lucado, one of America's most popular preachers, got dropped by his auto insurance because of speeding tickets and a fender bender that wasn't his fault. Max got a letter in the mail, telling him to seek coverage elsewhere. Pondering this in a theological way, Max imagined receiving a similar letter from the Pearly Gates Underwriting Division:

Dear Mr. Lucado:

This letter is in response to your most recent request for forgiveness. I'm sorry to inform you that you have reached your maximum quota of sins. Our records show that, since employing our services, you have been a frequent offender in the areas of greed and gluttony. In addition, your prayer life is substandard when compared to others of like age and circumstance.

Further review has revealed that your understanding of Christian doctrine is in the lowest quintile, and you appear to have excessive tendencies to envy. Because of these characteristics, you have been designated a high-risk candidate for heavenly rewards. You must understand that while your policy does include a period of grace, grace has its limits. Jesus sends His regrets and kindest regards and hopes that you will be able to find some other form of coverage.²

Along that line, making and keeping promises—guarantees—is not much in vogue these days. We seem to want to hedge our bets, wear our parachutes, and keep our options open, rather than making promises that set a firm course for our lives and for our relationships.

Some people—a few—do make and keep promises. They make guarantees. They choose not to quit when the going gets rough because they promised once to see it through. They stick to lost causes. They hold on to a love grown cold. They stay with people who have become difficult. They still dare to make promises and care enough to keep the promises they make—**because I said I would**. And if this is true of you, if you have a ship you will not desert, if you have people you will not forsake, if you have causes you will not abandon, then in that way, at least you are like God.³

The record of the Bible is actually the record of five covenants—promises, guarantees—that God made with us and with our ancestors. Time after time after time, God initiated special relationships with those whose hearts were in harmony with God's Spirit. Sadly, the more the descendants of those covenant leaders increased, the farther they moved from faithfulness to their covenant relationship with God.

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on March 1, 2020.

² Quoted in Brady Boyd, *Sons & Daughters* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 40.

³ Lewis Smedes, "The Power of Promises," in *A Chorus of Witnesses*, edited by Long and Plantinga (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

Adam and Eve's descendants became more and more wicked (Genesis 4:1-10), and God initiated a covenant with righteous Noah (Genesis 9:9-17). After the flood, Noah's descendants increased, but so did their wickedness, so God initiated a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-2, 15:17-21, 17:1-11). Abraham's descendants increased, but they ended up far from God, and God initiated a covenant with Moses to create a nation in unique covenant with God (Exodus 6:1-8).

Centuries passed, and the nation's failure to keep covenant with God led God to initiate a covenant with David and with his descendants (2 Samuel 7:12-16). The descendants of David missed the boat, too, so God initiated a very different covenant in the person of Jesus (Yeshua), the New Covenant of which we read in Jeremiah:

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The covenants of the Older Testament—with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David—were external covenants, and external laws governing behavior never work very well. Written on the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments and on the scrolls of the Torah, the Law of Moses was external, like a coat, able to be put on and taken off, and it often was. The New Covenant foretold by Jeremiah and fulfilled in Jesus (Yeshua) was—and is—an internal covenant, written not on stone or scroll but on mind and heart. And so it is that we come in our journey through the Bible to the book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 is the “high water” mark of Jeremiah's prophesies, and is arguably the zenith of God's revelation in the Older Testament. Whereas the Mosaic Covenant required obedience and faithfulness in order to remain in effect—faithfulness and obedience that were abrogated before Moses even came down from Mount Sinai with the Law—this New Covenant is entirely one-sided.

Through Jeremiah, God promised—*guaranteed*—that when the New Covenant was inaugurated at a time to be announced, God would do several things:

1. *“I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah” (vv. 31, 33).*
2. *“I will put my instructions deep within them” (v. 33).*
3. *“I will write [my instructions] on their hearts” (v. 33).*
4. *“I will be their God” (v. 33).*
5. *“I will forgive their wickedness” (v. 34).*
6. *“I will never again remember their sins” (v. 34).*

Jeremiah's prophecy of a New Covenant is a prominent theme in the New Testament (which means “New Covenant”),⁴ and its quotation in Hebrews 8:8-12 is the longest quotation in

⁴ Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; Romans 11:27; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:8-12, 9:15, 10:13, 12:24.

the New Testament. The radically new nature of this change is denoted by the ideas of a “new heart,” a “new spirit,” “regeneration,” and “rebirth.”⁵

That God should initiate such a covenant should not really have been a surprise. From the very beginning, God made it clear that biological descent from Abraham was neither sufficient nor necessary for inclusion among the people of God (Genesis 17:12-14). And all of the previous covenants find their culmination in the New Covenant, which both completes and transcends them.⁶ The New Covenant is the climactic fulfillment of the covenants God had previously established with the Patriarchs, the nation of Israel, and the dynasty of David.

It’s important that we see that the New Covenant Jeremiah announced was to be with Israel and Judah. The New Testament tells us that we Gentiles have been grafted into the Tree that is Israel. Christianity is not a Gentile religion, but a relationship God established with the descendants of Abraham into which we Gentiles have been graciously appended.⁷

It’s also important that we understand that the New Covenant is not God’s “Plan B.” God never intended the Law of Moses to be permanent or to bring about salvation. The Law of Moses is True and Right, but it functions in our lives pretty much like a “wet paint” sign. Putting up such a sign makes us want to touch things that we probably would not have touched otherwise.⁸ The real purpose of the Law of Moses was/is to show us that we cannot possibly keep it, and we therefore need God’s help.

The first mention of the need for a Savior and for a New Covenant appears in Genesis 3:15, but the Plan goes back much farther than that. The Bible tells us that Jesus is “*the Lamb who was killed before the world was made*” (Revelation 13:8); and even more amazingly, God wrote the precise dates of Messiah’s birth and of His perfect sacrifice into the Cosmos at the very moment of Creation.⁹ There has never been a Plan B.

The Older Testament and its Law did indeed come from God, but they are like the light of the moon in comparison to the Light of the Son. Like the wedding miracle at Cana, Jesus is God’s Very Best Wine, saved for the last but being prepared from the Dawn of Creation.

The Book of Hebrews focuses on the various dimensions of what the New Covenant means. Here are some of the things Hebrews tells us:

- *Jesus is the One who **guarantees** this better covenant with God* (Hebrews 7:22).
- *Because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever. Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him* (Hebrews 7:25).
- *With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever* (Hebrews 9:12).
- *And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him* (Hebrews 9:27-28).

⁵ Jeremiah 24:7, 32:39; Ezekiel 11:19, 18:31, 36:26-27, 37:14; John 1:10-13, 3:1-10; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; 1 John 4:7, 5:18.

⁶ Physical inheritance; divine-human relationship; an everlasting dynasty; blessing on both national and international levels

⁷ Romans 9:30-33, 11:11-32; Matthew 28:19-20; John 1:11-13; Acts 10:9-47. The *Tree of Life Version* (TLV) of the Bible is designed to make this crystal clear. www.tlvbiblesociety.org

⁸ Paul develops this idea in Romans 7:7-13.

⁹ <http://www.bethlehemstar.com/setting-the-stage/>
https://www.sugarsync.com/pf/D4578347_09663014_6496224

While He walked among us, Jesus repeatedly said that He would offer and was offering Himself as our Perfect Sacrifice for Sin. On His way to Jerusalem for the last time, Jesus told His disciples that “*the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45). And on the night of His betrayal, Jesus told His disciples, “*This cup is the **New Covenant** in my blood, which is poured out for you*” (Luke 22:20).

So it is that we celebrate Calvary’s New Covenant to this very day, not with the sacrifices of bulls and goats, but with those symbolic elements of bread and wine used in the Passover meal. Jesus is our Passover Lamb, by whose blood we are forgiven, by whose blood we are healed. Isaiah knew it would eventually be so: *All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all* (Isaiah 53:6).

Beyond all this, Hebrews tells us that we live our lives by “*keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne*” (Hebrews 12:2).

My friends, before God ever spoke the Word of Creation, Calvary’s cross was already in view. The shadow of that cross fell even across Bethlehem’s manger. And later, when the day of crucifixion had finally come, the Bible tells us that Jesus chose to go to the cross **because of the joy he knew would be his afterward** (Hebrews 12:2).

Now if Jesus created everything in the heavens and on earth—and He did—and if He holds all creation together at this very moment—which He does¹⁰—what could possibly be available to Him on the far side of the cross that wasn’t available without it? I suggest to you that there’s only one thing in the incredible expanse of this expanding universe that Jesus didn’t have without the cross: **the possibility of spending eternity with you.**

“So then,” Hebrews tells us, “*since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. ¹⁵ This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most*” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

One more story and I’m done. Pastor Steve Brown once counseled a woman who had been unfaithful to her husband twenty years before. That sin had haunted her all those years, and Pastor Steve was the first person she had ever told about it. Here’s how he told the story:

“After we talked and prayed for a long time, I recommended she tell her husband. (That, by the way, isn’t always the advice I give. In this case, I knew the woman’s husband and knew that her revelation, after the initial shock, would probably strengthen their marriage.) It wasn’t easy for her, but she promised she would tell him. ‘Pastor,’ she said, ‘I trust you enough to do what you ask, but if my marriage falls apart as a result, I want you to know I’m going to blame you.’ She didn’t smile when she said that, either.

“I began to pray with a high degree of seriousness. (I pray best when I’m scared.) ‘Father,’ I prayed, ‘if I gave her dumb advice, forgive me and clean up my mess.’

“I saw her the next day, and she looked fifteen years younger. ‘What happened?’ I asked.

“ ‘When I told him,’ she exclaimed, ‘he told me that he had known about the incident for twenty years and was just waiting for me to tell him so he could tell me how much he loved me!’

¹⁰ Colossians 1:15-20

And then she started to laugh. ‘He forgave me twenty years ago, and I’ve been needlessly carrying all this guilt for all these years!’¹¹

My friend, you, too, may have some secret sin that has burdened your spirit and damaged your life for many years. If so, I’m very glad to be able to tell you that, like this dear woman, God forgave you long ago and is just waiting for you to confess your sin so that your Father in Heaven can tell you how much you are loved! **It’s guaranteed.**

Now we are free, there’s no condemnation,
Jesus provides a perfect salvation;
“Come unto me,” O hear His sweet call,
Come, and He saves us once for all.

Once for all, O sinner, receive it!
Once for all, O friend, now believe it!
Cling to the Cross, the burden will fall,
Christ has redeemed us once for all! ¹²

¹¹ Steve Brown, *When Being Good Isn't Enough* (Lucid Books, 2014), pp. 10-11.

¹² Philip P. Bliss, “Free from the Law, O Happy Condition,” in *Sunshine for Sunday Schools*, 1873.