

THE POWER OF A PROMISE KEPT

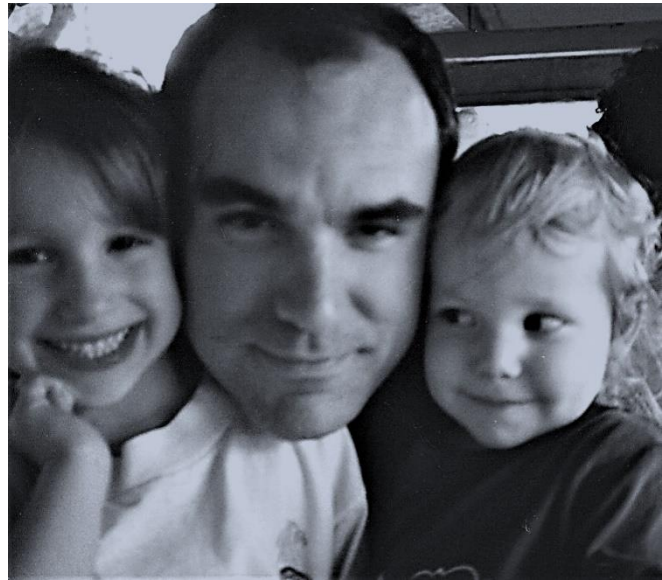
A Devotional Meditation on Nitzavim (You Are Standing) and Vayalekh (And He Went)

Deuteronomy 29:10-31:30; Isaiah 61:10-63:9; Romans 3:1-4

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The importance of keeping a promise is a lesson my wife and I learned from our parents. They taught us by consistently keeping their word. They made mistakes, of course, as did we when we became parents, but thanks to them we learned the lesson of trustworthiness, and are passing it on to our children and grandchildren.

My focus has been on the words, “I promise.” I wanted my daughters to know that whenever I uttered those words, I would do all I could to keep my promise. Whether it was something simple like playing a game, or something special like a day at the zoo or the movies, they needed to know they could count on me. That helped them learn to be reliable women of honor, and gave them the confidence of trusting their parents as they approached the world from the safe place we had established for them.



We kept our promises to our daughters, both for ordinary daily things and for special events like a trip to the zoo. That's how they learned who to trust in an untrustworthy world. (Photo by The Barking Fox, October 1995.)

The importance of this comes into focus as we contemplate our shared human story. Tales of broken faith abound, and betrayal resonates with us all. Whether it's the “stab in the back” in a game of strategy, or the sting of a business partner embezzling company funds, the pain of broken faith sears our consciences and compels us to develop defenses against enemies, and against friends and family who know our vulnerabilities. That's why it is crucial we find a safe place with people worthy of trust. If we have such a safe place, then we can face a hostile world of betrayers with confidence. If we do not find that safe place, then we go the way of the world, seeking safety in our own strength and cunning, and trusting no one.

That is how people end up walking away from our Creator. If people understand that He is reliable, then they are less likely to run away from Him. It's hard, though, because His ways are different from ours. That makes it difficult to see how reliable He is, and how He comes through on His promises, especially if the promise-keeping process requires millennia to reach completion. Yet we can see many promises He has kept, and with that evidence we can be confident that He will finish everything He has started. That's the stuff of faith. It's why Paul can say,

Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, “That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.”

Romans 3:4 ESV (quoting Psalm 51:4)

If we can't trust our Creator, we have no hope, and our lives have little meaning and even less value. Therefore, we have to trust Him even if – or especially if – we don't understand His ways. The formulas and doctrines of today may need correction tomorrow as they encounter something clearly of God that contradicts our human understanding. Paul was addressing one of those points of correction, as we see when we read his words in context:

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, “That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.”

Romans 3:1-4 ESV

This is part of Paul's essay on the continued relevance of God's Covenant Nation of Israel, and his assertion that Gentile followers of Messiah Yeshua somehow become part of that Covenant Nation. That's the only way the promises of God given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants can be applied to those who cannot claim to be in the lineage of the Patriarchs. Paul relies on the precedent established by Moses in the final proclamation of covenant he made to the native-born of Israel and the foreigners who had joined with them:

You are standing today, all of you, before *ADONAI* your God—the heads of your tribes, your elders, your officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, and the outsider within your camp (from your woodchopper to your water carrier). Each of you is to cross over into the covenant of *ADONAI* your God that He is cutting with you today, and into His oath. This is in order to confirm you today as His people. So He will be your God, just as He promised you and just as He swore to your fathers—to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. Not with you alone am I cutting this covenant and this oath, but with whomever is standing here with us today before *ADONAI* our God and with whomever is not here with us today.

Deuteronomy 29:9-14 (10-15) TLV

That's a powerful declaration, but there's an even more powerful promise that comes with it. Moses explains that the Hebrews will walk away from the covenant of redemption, and from their Redeemer, but then he says:

Now when all these things come upon you—the blessing and the curse that I have set before you—and you take them to heart in all the nations where *ADONAI* your God has banished you, and you return to *ADONAI* your God and listen to His voice according to all that I am commanding you today—you and your children—with all your heart and with all your soul, then *ADONAI* your God will bring you back from captivity and have compassion on you, and He will return and gather you from all the peoples where *ADONAI* your God has scattered you. Even if your outcasts are at the ends of the heavens, from there *ADONAI* your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. *ADONAI* your God will bring you into the land that your

fathers possessed, and you will possess it; and He will do you good and multiply you more than your fathers. Also *ADONAI* your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants—to love *ADONAI* your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.

Deuteronomy 30:1-6 TLV

The Jewish people – the visible remnant of Israel – are back in the Promised Land, making the desert bloom, rebuilding the destroyed cities, and reclaiming that which was lost. So, then, did they begin to return to Adonai their God while in exile? Did some portion of the people, at least, listen to His voice and begin, with all their heart and soul, to do what He had commanded through Moses and the prophets?

The evidence before our eyes is that they are now being returned from all the peoples where God scattered them, and even from the ends of the heavens. This has happened even though the Jewish people, for the most part, have not done what Christians have expected for centuries: they have not acknowledged Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah, and they most certainly have not walked away from the Torah.

What does this do to our faith as the people of Messiah Yeshua?

It should strengthen our faith in Him as we learn more of what Messiah is to all Israel. Since He has kept His promises to our Jewish brethren, then we know He will keep all His promises to restore Israel and bring the final redemption of the whole world. That's a reason to rejoice, to ask Him for clarified revelation about His promise-keeping process, and to join our brethren of Israel as His agents of redemption.

This is the message of life and hope this dying and hopeless world needs. It's the power of a promise kept.