

PROMISES MADE



A FAMILY DEVOTIONAL
FOR CHRISTMAS

MARTY MACHOWSKI
ILLUSTRATED BY PHIL SCHORR

PROMISES MADE PROMISES KEPT

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INTRODUCTION

“MY EYES LONG FOR YOUR SALVATION AND FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF YOUR RIGHTEOUS PROMISE.” PSALM 119:123

Promises Made explores the key Christmas promises God made to his people before the birth of Christ. I call them “Christmas” promises because God fulfilled all of them through the life, ministry, and death of Jesus, whose birth we celebrate on Christmas.

From the moment Adam and Eve sinned, God provided the promise of a Savior. Through grace, Eve would give birth to a Son. While the wicked serpent would strike his heel, the Son would crush the serpent’s head, restoring Adam and Eve’s relationship with God. For generations, the Son would speak as a Prophet, reign as a King, serve as a Shepherd, and be God incarnate.

Studying the Christmas promises encourages us to treasure the true meaning of Christmas; it fosters faith and joy. The prophets who foretold these promises longed to see them come to pass, but did not live to see the day of Christ’s birth. We, however, are privileged to celebrate the coming of the prophesied Savior every Christmas morning.

Promises Made is designed to be started one week before Christmas. Beginning on December 18, read one chapter (four pages) each day and discuss the listed questions as a family.

After reading “The Greatest Sign of All Time” (the final story in *Promises Made*) on Christmas Eve, here is an idea for how to transition to reading *Promises Kept*. Early Christmas morning, set the book with the *Promises Kept* cover face up, on a white cloth (representing God’s forgiveness). If you wish, surround it with treats and baked goods to celebrate Christmas. Your children will wake up to the wonderful surprise, and you can begin by reading “The Waiting Is Over” (the first story in *Promises Kept*). Read a new story every day for the next week.

PROMISES MADE



THE PROMISE OF A SON

GENESIS 1-3; 6:5
ROMANS 5:12-17
HEBREWS 11:3



GOD DELIVERED HIS FIRST CHRISTMAS PROMISE VERY EARLY IN THE CREATION STORY—RIGHT AFTER ADAM AND EVE SINNED.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Where there had been nothing, he created everything—all by his power. God made man, Adam, out of the dust of the earth and gave him breath. Then God created woman, Eve, as a wife for Adam. He gave them a beautiful garden called Eden, where he lived and walked among them. He assigned them to care for the garden and told them they could eat fruit from all the trees except one—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they ate from that tree, God told Adam and Eve they would surely die.

Adam and Eve lived as God's people, in God's place, walking and delighting in God. Eden was heaven on earth, and everything was very good. You might say it was Christmas every day, for God was with them and everything was just as it should be. God commanded Adam and Eve to fill the earth with children.

As Adam and Eve walked with God and obeyed his commands, they always knew joy; they never knew fear. They could eat from the tree of life and live forever. But Adam and Eve never got to taste that eternal fruit.

Not long after creation, the evil one, Satan, entered Eden as a serpent. Soon he tempted Eve to eat from the *one* tree God had made off limits. Eve obeyed the serpent, took a bite, and disobeyed God. Then Adam followed Eve and did the same. And so, sin entered the world for the very first time. All at once, Adam and Eve were aware of their nakedness. They quickly covered themselves with leaves, to hide their shame.



Of course, God knew that Adam and Eve had sinned. He wasn't at all surprised, and he immediately went to find them.

If you recall, God had said earlier that the punishment for eating from that tree was death. So when God called to Adam and Eve, they were afraid and tried hiding from him. But it's impossible to hide from God. When he stood before them, he asked them what had happened. Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. Again, God wasn't surprised. He knew from eternity past—even before he created the earth—that Adam and Eve would disobey him. And so, long before time began, God planned to extend mercy through a Christmas promise: forgiveness.

God promised that a future Son would bruise (crush) the serpent's head and reverse sin's curse. While God did not explain how the future Son would accomplish this, he did provide a clue. Forgiveness required the shedding of blood. So, God killed animals, and from their hides, he made clothing to cover Adam and Eve's shame. The animals sacrificed that day were a picture of the cost of forgiveness. One day, the Lamb of God, Jesus, would die to cover the sins of God's people.

Till then, God cursed the land. Thorns would invade, making it hard for Adam to grow food. Eve would experience pain in childbirth. And God made them leave Eden, and the tree of life, forever. He posted an angel to stand guard so they could never return. Without the fruit from the tree of life, Adam and Eve would grow old and die. Their hope now rested in the Christmas promise of a future Son. But, because their children were born into sin, evil spread. Soon their children forgot about God, and by the days of Noah, people only did evil all the time.

QUESTIONS:

1. Who created the heavens and the earth?
2. What did God say would be the punishment for sin?
3. What is the Christmas promise God gave Adam and Eve?
4. How did the animal skins point to Jesus?

Answers: (1) God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing, by the power of his command. (2) The penalty for sin is death. (3) Forgiveness: One day, a future Son would be born to bruise [crush] the head of the serpent. (4) Just as the animal skins covered Adam and Eve's nakedness and shame, the blood of Christ covers our sin and shame. For by his death, we are forgiven.



PROMISES MADE

2

A PROMISE FOR THE NATIONS

GENESIS 17:5-8; 21:5; 22:1-17
HEBREWS 11:19





AS THE OFFSPRING OF ADAM AND EVE MULTIPLIED AND FILLED THE EARTH, SO DID THEIR SIN. Soon they turned against God completely. They became so evil that God actually felt sorry that he had made them. So, he made a plan to start over. He would bring judgment on the entire earth through a worldwide flood.

Thankfully, there was still one man on the earth who loved and trusted God. His name was Noah (Genesis 6–9). God chose to save Noah and his family in order to continue the Christmas promise he first gave Adam and Eve. Though the flood destroyed the earth, God kept Noah and his family

safe in an ark. When the flood was over and the ark reached land, God told Noah's family to fill the earth with children again. Noah's grandchildren would preserve the Christmas promise to raise up a future Son to break sin's curse.

While the flood cleansed the world of evil, it couldn't completely remove sin. It had already spread to every descendant of Adam and Eve, including Noah's family. Soon they wanted to build their own way to heaven, apart from God, by building a giant tower (Genesis 11). But instead of destroying them, as he did in the flood, God had mercy on his people. He confused their languages and scattered them across the earth.



Out of all the people of all the nations, God chose Abram from Ur to carry on the Christmas promise. Even though Abram and his wife Sarai were childless and too old to bear children, God promised to give them a son. God gave Abram a new name, *Abraham*, and promised that through his descendants, kings would arise. Abraham was one hundred years old when his wife finally gave birth to their son, Isaac. The Christmas promise of a future Son and King would now come through Isaac. But first, God had to test Abraham.

When Isaac had grown, God said to Abraham, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Genesis 22:2). God was testing Abraham to see if he loved God more than his son.

Abraham believed in God’s promise and everlasting covenant. If God allowed him to sacrifice his son, Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead. So, Abraham took his son to Moriah as God directed. When they arrived, Isaac asked his father, “Where is the lamb for the offering?” Abraham answered, “God will provide the lamb.”

But as Abraham took the knife to sacrifice his son, an angel of the Lord called out saying, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me” (Genesis 22:12). God provided a substitute sacrifice, a ram caught in the thicket, which Abraham sacrificed in place of his son. The Lord promised Abraham that because he had not withheld his only son, his descendants would be more numerous than the sand of the seashore and the stars of the sky. He promised that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his family. The blessing of the nations is another Christmas promise.

Looking back, it is easy to see that the ram that died in Isaac’s place is a picture of Jesus, whom God provided to die in our place. The call for Abraham to give up his only son is a picture of God giving up his only Son, Jesus—the far-off blessing for the nations promised to Abraham. But two thousand years would pass before Christ’s birth on Christmas.

QUESTIONS:

1. How did God preserve his promise through the flood?
2. Did the flood destroy sin?
3. Why did God call Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac as an offering to the Lord?
4. Where do we see Jesus in this story?

Answers: (1) God preserved Noah and his family on the ark. The promise of a Son would now come through the line of Noah. (2) While the flood cleansed the world of evil, it could not remove sin. (3) God tested Abraham’s faith to see if he trusted God’s plan. (4) The ram that died in Isaac’s place points forward to Jesus, who died in our place. Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, is a picture of God giving up his only Son.