

The Awesome, Awful Promises of God

The Bible is a book that's full of promises, and its main character is a promise-maker. Almost nine thousand promises are made in Scripture, and eighty-five percent of them are promises that God made to human beings. Many of God's promises are hopeful and optimistic, like when He pledged to love us, to save us, and to give us eternal life. But some of His promises in the Bible seem hopeless and grim, such as His repeated vows to punish sins and destroy the world as we know it.

So how should we interpret and understand the full range of God's promises in the Bible? Do God's positive promises contradict with His unpleasant ones, or is there a way to reconcile them? And how do the promises that God made thousands of years ago apply to our lives today? In January and February at The Story, we'll explore these questions and more throughout this series by taking a closer look at the specific promises that God made through the Old Testament prophet Isaiah.

January 19, 2025 - Part 3 - God's Promise of Inclusion

Opening Question: According to some recent studies, Christianity in America has a reputation for being more "exclusive" than "inclusive". Why do you think this is the case?

Why is it so important, in this particular moment in our culture, for Christians to clarify our stance on things like "diversity" and "inclusion"?

Have you ever known someone who rejected Christianity because they felt that the Church is too exclusive? How did you respond?

Throughout the Bible, we find evidence of God's desire to love and welcome all people, even as early as the days of Abraham -

Gen. 17:1-5 When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers... As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; you will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.

How did this covenant reveal God's heart for all people?

What historical reasons did Israelite people have to despise the Egyptians?

Isaiah 19:19-25 In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the heart of Egypt, and a monument to the Lord at its border. It will be a sign and witness to the Lord Almighty in the land of Egypt. When they cry out to the Lord because of their oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender, and he will rescue them. So the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the Lord. They will worship with sacrifices and grain offerings; they will make vows to the Lord and

keep them. The Lord will strike Egypt with a plague; he will strike them and heal them. They will turn to the Lord, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them. In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."

Why was this prophecy from Isaiah so shocking and off-putting to many in Israel? How have some Hebrew teachers sought to change its meaning?

What things have happened since Isaiah's prophecy that offer clues about God's persistent desire to redeem the people of Egypt and Assyria?

What evidence do we find in the New Testament that God intended the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to usher in a new era of diversity and inclusion? (See *Romans 11:32, 1 Timothy 2:1-6, and John 3:16*)

What is the difference between "Inclusion" and "Universalism"? Why does it matter?

How does the idea of God's inclusive heart change your perspective on Christian faith?

Your Notes:



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Registration for all of our Spring groups is OPEN! Stop by our registration table by the front entrance on Sundays to learn more about our Group offerings in-person or sign up online via our website page: thestory.church/groups



Upcoming Partnership Course

Come learn more about The Story's history, beliefs, and ministries, and become an official Partner (our version of membership) at our three-week Partnership Course. Session starts Wednesday, January 29. Learn more and register on: thestory.church/events



The Worry-Free Parent with Sissy Goff

Join us at The Story on Saturday, February 8 at 10am for a special presentation, book signing, and meet-and-greet with author and podcast host Sissy Goff! Tickets are available on thestory.church/events - and they are selling quickly!