

Question: "How do I know which of God's promises are for me?"

There are literally hundreds of promises in the Bible. How can we know which promises apply to us, which promises we can claim? To frame this question another way, how can one tell the difference between general promises and specific promises? A general promise is one that is given by the Holy Spirit to every believer in every age. When the author penned the promise, he set no limitations on time period or recipient.

An example of a general promise is 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This promise is based on the forgiving nature of God and is available to all believers everywhere. Another example of a general promise is Philippians 4:7, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." This promise is made to all believers who, refusing to worry, bring their requests to God (v. 8). Other examples of general promises include Psalm 1:3; 27:10; 31:24; John 4:13-14 (note the word "whoever"); and Revelation 3:20.

A specific promise is one that is made to specific individuals on specific occasions. The context of the promise will usually make clear who the recipient is. For example, the promise of 1 Kings 9:5 is very specific: "I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever." The preceding and following verses make it clear that the Lord is speaking only to King Solomon.

Luke 2:35 contains another specific promise: "And a sword will pierce your own soul too." This prophecy/promise was directed to Mary and was fulfilled in her lifetime. While a specific promise is not made to all believers generally, the Holy Spirit can still use a specific promise to guide or encourage any of His children. For example, the promise of Isaiah 54:10 was written with Israel in mind, but the Holy Spirit has used these words to comfort many Christians today: "my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed."

As he was led to take the gospel to the Gentiles, the apostle Paul claimed the promise of Isaiah: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47). Isaiah's promise was originally meant for the Messiah, but in it Paul found guidance from the Lord for his own life. When claiming a promise from Scripture, we should keep the following principles in mind:

- 1) Promises are often conditional. Look for the word "if" in the context.
- 2) God gives us promises to help us better submit to His will and trust Him. A promise does not make God bend to our will.
- 3) Do not assume to know precisely when, where, or how the promise will be fulfilled in your life.

Recommended Resource: [God's Promises for You: Scripture Selections from Max Lucado.](#)