### God’s Faithfulness

**1. Definitions**

Wayne Grudem provides the following definition of the Lord’s faithfulness: “God’s faithfulness means that God will always do what he has said and fulfill what he has promised.”[[1]](#footnote-1) It is helpful to compare the concept of faithfulness with honesty. The Lord is truthful *in* what He says, and faithful *to* what He says.

**2. Biblical Data**

Scripture clearly testifies of the Lord’s faithfulness. The Old Testament recaps God making covenants with people. In the course of human history, He never broke one of His covenants. Regarding the covenant with Noah, “Seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night” have not ceased (Gen 8:22). The descendants of Abraham still enjoy blessing (Gen 12:2-3; Rom 4:16), and a descendant of David is still enthroned (2 Sam 7:16; Acts 2:34-36).

When God makes a covenant, He provides a sign of that covenant. In Noah’s case, it was the rainbow, which “reminds” Him of His promise (Gen 9:13-16). For Abraham, God re-enacted a covenant ceremony that was customary for people of that time (Gen 15:9-21).

One can trace Yahweh’s faithfulness to Abraham’s descendants throughout the Old Testament. He abundantly blessed and protected Abraham and his offspring, the heirs of that covenant, preserving them in times of famine (Gen 47) and delivering them from slavery in Egypt (Ex 6:2-5). The Lord also blessed others who were associated with Abraham, even though they were not in the covenant: Lot (Gen 19:29), Ishmael (Gen 21:12-13), and Esau (Gen 33:9).

On Mount Sinai, God confirmed His covenant with Israel as descendants of Abraham. He promised to give them the land in fulfillment of His promise to Abraham (Ex 33:1; Deut 1:8). Moses assured God’s people, “He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them” (Deut 4:31).

Yahweh faithfully fulfilled His promise to Israel and gave them the land of Canaan. As God had promised, they conquered the inhabitants of the land and took possession of it. This inspired the following classic text: “Not one of the good promises which Yahweh had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass” (Josh 21:45; 23:14).

Several times the Torah directly speaks of Yahweh’s faithfulness:

- God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? (Num 23:19).

- Know therefore that Yahweh your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments (Deut 7:9).[[2]](#footnote-2)

- A God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He (Deut 32:4).

Later Old Testament books continue to laud Yahweh’s faithful nature. In prayer to God, Solomon exclaims, “Blessed be Yahweh, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised; not one word has failed of all His good promise, which He promised through Moses His servant” (1 Kin 8:56). God kept His word to David by giving to him and his descendants ascendancy over the tribes of Israel (1 Chr 11:3; 1 Kin 8:20). Aware of this, Solomon again praises Yahweh: “…who has kept with Your servant David, my father, that which You have promised him; indeed You have spoken with Your mouth and have fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day” (2 Chr 6:15).

In the Old Testament historical books, we often encounter the phrase, “…according to the word of Yahweh, which He spoke” or something similar: when the siege of Samaria was lifted (2 Kin 7:16), when four descendants of Jehu ascended the throne of Israel (2 Kin 15:12), when Judah returned from captivity after 70 years (2 Chr 36:21-22), and when Joash defeated Syria (2 Kin 13:19, 25). In the last instance, God’s faithfulness is extolled in spite of Israel’s unfaithfulness: “But Yahweh was gracious to them and had compassion on them and turned to them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them or cast them from His presence until now” (2 Kin 13:23).

Not only do the Lord’s promises find fulfillment, but His warnings do as well. He performed His word of judgment in regard to the households of Jeroboam (1 Kin 15:29-30), Baasha (1 Kin 16:12), and Ahab (1 Kin 22:38), in regard to the rebuilders of Jericho (1 Kin 16:34), and in regard to Jeroboam’s idolatrous altar (2 Kin 23:16).

The Psalms also praise Yahweh’s faithfulness. There, we often encounter the term אְֶמֶת (*emet*), which can be translated “truth,” “faithfulness,” “reliability,” or “stability.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Note the following examples: “Your faithfulness (אְֶמֶת) {reaches} to the skies” (Ps 36:5; 57:10; 108:4); “His faithfulness (אְֶמֶת) is a shield and bulwark” (Ps 91:4); and, “To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning and Your faithfulness (אְֶמֶת) by night” (Ps 92:3). No one who trust in Him will be put to shame (Ps 25:3; 22:5). Yahweh “will never allow the righteous to be shaken” (Ps 55:22).

Another term that describes Yahweh’s faithfulness is אְֶמוּנָה (*emuna*), which come from root אמן (*aman*), i.e., “faith, faithfulness.” The word occurs in Ps 100:5: “His faithfulness (אְֶמוּנָה) to all generations,” in Ps 89:1-2: “To all generations I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth…. In the heavens You will establish Your faithfulness (אְֶמוּנָה),” and in Ps 33:4: “All His work is {done} in faithfulness (אְֶמוּנָה).”

The Psalms proclaim that the Lord is faithful forever (Ps 119:89-90; 146:6). He remembers His covenant forever (Ps 111:5). He will never forsake His own: “Those who know Your name will put their trust in You, for You, O Yahweh, have not forsaken those who seek You” (Ps 9:10).

If Yahweh is faithful, it follows that His Word is as well: “The words of Yahweh are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times” (Ps 12:6), The word of Yahweh is tried (Ps 18:30; 119:140), “All His precepts are sure” (Ps 111:7).

The Psalms also recount the Lord’s faithfulness in practice – how it manifests in the life of His people. Psalm 105:8-15 speaks of His faithful deeds for His friend, Abraham, Psalm 98:3 – for Israel, and Psalm 89 – for David.

God’s faithfulness brings confidence in prayer. The psalmist often relies on the Lord’s faithfulness when expecting His intervention in difficult situations: “Where are Your former lovingkindnesses, O Lord, which You swore to David in Your faithfulness?” (Ps 89:49); and, “Do not deliver the soul of Your turtledove to the wild beast; do not forget the life of Your afflicted forever. Consider the covenant” (Ps 74:19-20).

In the prophets, we gain more insight into Yahweh’s nature of faithfulness. Isaiah writes, “Yahweh… is faithful” (49:7). According to Jeremiah, His faithfulness is “great”(Lam 3:23). He will never let His people down: “Those who hopefully wait for Me will not be put to shame” (Isa 49:23). He is “watching over (His) word to perform it” (Jer 1:12). His “covenant of peace will not be shaken” (Isa 54:10). Both His promises and His warnings “will certainly come,” and, “will not delay” (Hab 2:3; Isa 31:2).

The prophets also recount Yahweh’s faithfulness in the history of Israel. He gave the Promised Land to the patriarchs (Jer 32:22). He brought the punishments which He threatened upon Israel (Jer 40:2-3), yet He preserved a remnant (Isa 1:9) and promised it a future restoration (Isa 14:1-4), which took place in its time. God’s faithfulness is the basis for Israel’s hope: “Are You not from everlasting, O Yahweh, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. You, O Yahweh, have appointed them to judge; And You, O Rock, have established them to correct” (Hab 1:12).

The Lord assures His chosen ones that His Word will unfailingly come to pass, even when it seems impossible (Jer 37:10). Even if the fulfillment is not immediate, it will certainly come. He says to Ezekiel:

Son of man, what is this proverb you {people} have concerning the land of Israel, saying, “The days are long and every vision fails”? Therefore say to them, “Thus says the Lord Yahweh, ‘I will make this proverb cease so that they will no longer use it as a proverb in Israel.’ But tell them, “The days draw near as well as the fulfillment of every vision” (Ezek 12:22-23).

The final Old Testament books, written during and after the exile, continue to confirm the testimony of the previous books. Yahweh is the one who kept His word to Abraham about inheriting the Promised Land: “(You) made a covenant with him To give {him} the land of the Canaanite, of the Hittite and the Amorite, of the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite – to give {it} to his descendants. And You have fulfilled Your promise, For You are righteous” (Neh 9:8).

However, if God’s promises were given conditionally, then their fulfillment would depend on people fulfilling those conditions (Zech 6:15). Yet, since His promise to the descendants of Abraham was given without condition, God, in His faithfulness, will restore Israel (Ezra 1:1; Zech 8:14-15). The fact that neither the Lord, nor His Word can change, gives God’s people hope for the future: “I, Yahweh, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed” (Mal 3:6). On this basis, God’s people can appeal to Him for aid (Neh 9:32; Dan 9:3ff).

The New Testament, of course, affirms the truth of the Lord’s faithfulness as well. He is the “faithful Creator” (1 Pet 4:19). The One seated on the white throne is “faithful and true” (Rev 19:11). The New Testament emphasizes God’s faithfulness especially in regard to Him keeping His people faithful to Him. He is faithful to guard from sin (1 Cor 10:13), forgive sin (1 Jn 1:9), fully sanctify believers (1 Thes 5:24), confirm believers and keep them from the evil one (2 Thes 3:3; 2 Pet 2:5-9), and to preserve them until the end (1 Cor 1:8-9).[[4]](#footnote-4)

The Lord’s always keeps His promises (2 Cor 1:18-20), namely to Simeon (Lk 2:26-29), Abraham (Acts 7:17), and many others. “He who believes in him will not be disappointed” (1 Pet 2:6). Although we do not always see an immediate fulfillment of His promises, they unfailing come to pass (2 Pet 3:8-9). Believers are called to imitate Sarah, who “considered Him faithful who had promised” (Heb 11:11). Therefore, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23).

**3. Theological Considerations**

In conclusion, we will compare the Lord’s faithfulness with several others of His attributes. In His righteousness, God always acts in accordance with His *nature*, while in His faithfulness, He always acts in accordance with His *Word*. In the light of God’s omnipotence, we can conclude that His almighty power guarantees that He can do all that He has promised.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The final association we will make is between God’s faithfulness and His sovereignty. Here, we must emphasize a certain feature to avoid falling into error. Can God, being Lord over all, use His freedom to fail to keep His promises? We deny such a possibility. In His sovereignty, the Lord *makes* His promises, while in His faithfulness He unfailingly *keeps* them.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Let us look at this issue in more detail. We must always keep in mind that all of the Lord’s attributes interact with one another, influence one another, and limit each other. In this instance, His sovereignty does not nullify His faithfulness. In fact, when God promises something, His makes a free and sovereign decision to do so – no one forced Him to extend that promise. After He has promised something, however, He cannot go back on what He said. So then, in His sovereignty, He makes promises, while in His faithfulness, He fulfills them.

Helm explains this well:

By his promises God binds himself and therefore (in providential terms) limits himself to the performance of certain actions in the future. Before the promises are made, there are no constraints; once they are made, God is bound by what He has said, and his providential activity has to be ordered accordingly. God is not bound by some external force, of course, but he binds himself.[[7]](#footnote-7)

1. Grudem W. Systematic Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. – P. 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Duffield G. P., Van Cleave N. M. Foundations of Pentecostal Theology. – Los Angeles, CА: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983. – P. 79; Strong A. H. Systematic Theology. – 1886. – P. 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Brown F., Driver S. R., Briggs C. A. Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. – Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000. – P. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Duffield, p. 79; Strong, p. 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Erickson M. J. Christian Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983. – V. 1. – P. 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Helm P. The Providence of God. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1993. – P. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)