



Daily Verse and Comment

Romans 11:33

(33) Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!

James 1:17

(17) Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

New King James Version

Most successful televangelists preach what is called "the Prosperity Gospel." Using select Scriptures, they teach that if one gives his life to [Jesus](#), and if he follows certain biblical principles, [God](#) is obligated to fulfill His promises of wealth, health, and well-being. In the end, God becomes little more than a genie-in-a-bottle, granting wishes out of sheer compulsion. To these preachers, this is the abundant life God promises, and hundreds of thousands of people agree with them.

It is true that the Bible is full of promises. It is also true that Jesus tells us several times in John 14-16, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" ([John 14:14](#); see also 14:13; 15:7, 16; 16:23-24, 26). [Psalm 37:4](#) pledges, "Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." These sound like absolute promises, and if God is to be true to His Word, He must fulfill them, right?

This is what the televangelists have concluded, but in the end, it is a facile conclusion. Very few of God's promises in the Bible are absolute in nature; they are, instead, *conditional* promises, governed not only by our responses

to God, fulfilling certain requirements, but also by the perfect judgment of God. As [James 1:17](#) says, He gives only good and perfect gifts; He will never give one of His children a "blessing" that would ultimately derail His purpose for him or that would be too much for him to handle.

It works similarly among mere mortals. A human parent would not send his son to vocational school if he really wanted him to be a doctor, even though tuition to the vocational school would be a "good thing." Likewise, the same parent would not entrust his child with thousands of dollars in cash at Toys 'R Us, despite the fact that such sums of money would be considered a wonderful gift. If human parents have enough [wisdom](#) to give goal- and maturity-dependent gifts to their children, how much more does God ([Romans 11:33](#))?

The faithful Abraham and Sarah are good examples of this aspect of God's promises. In [Genesis 12:2](#), God tells Abraham, age 75 at the time (verse 4), that He would make of him "a great nation," implying that he would have children. God makes this promise again in verse 7: "The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.'" Yet, He does not give Abraham the promised child when he is 76 or 78 or 80!

After his rescue of Lot from the confederation of kings, Abraham pleads with God in [Genesis 15:2-3](#)—he is now 80 years old—for an heir. God repeats the promise, and Abraham believes Him (verses 4-6), yet Sarah does not become pregnant any time soon. Later, after Ishmael is born of Hagar when Abraham is 86 years old ([Genesis 16:16](#)), the patriarch wonders if this is the promised seed, but when the boy is thirteen—Abraham is now 99!—God reiterates, "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son" ([Genesis 17:19](#)).

Finally,

. . . the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. . . . Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son [Isaac](#) was born to him. ([Genesis 21:1-2](#), 5)

Evidently, a great deal had to happen in the lives of Abraham and Sarah—predominantly in terms of spiritual maturity—before God felt the right time had come to give them their promised baby boy. *Twenty-five years* passed before God fulfilled His promise. Notice that Scripture itself informs us that God performed the miracle to allow Sarah to conceive "at the set time." There was one perfect time for this promise to be fulfilled, and God fulfilled it when all the conditions were right.

And we can thank Him profusely for doing the same for us ([II Corinthians 4:15](#)).

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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