

(Front Cover)
(Fourth Edition – Seventh Printing, 2005)

The Promise

THE BEGINNING OF ALL CREATION

*In the beginning
God created the
heavens and the
earth.*

GENESIS 1:1

BEFORE THE BEGINNING of time, there were no tall trees, majestic mountains or starry sky. Only God was there. He tells us what happened in his true book, the Bible.

God created, that is, made out of nothing, the heaven and the earth. But the world had no form and it was empty. Suddenly God said, "*Let there be light!*" and there was light. You see, God has all power. Using only his almighty word he created all that is found in heaven and on earth.

God created everything in six days. That's right, it did not take him millions of years. God's Word, the Bible, confirms the six days of creation when we read, "*There was evening, there was morning--the first day.*" God's Word states the same for the second, third, and on through all six days. Each day God spoke, "*Let there be,*" and by his almighty word there came into being--light, sky, dry land, oceans and rivers, green plants and trees, sun, moon, and stars, fish, livestock and wild animals. There was definite order in all that God did and made.

But the best of all visible creatures was specially created on the sixth day. It was man. It was woman. Man and woman are special for many reasons. Adam, the first man, was formed out of the dust of the ground by God himself. And the first woman, Eve, was made by God from a rib of Adam. Indeed, they were specially made.

Man was also special because he was created in the image of God. That does not mean that man looked like God. Man cannot look like God because God is a spirit. God does not have flesh and bones that human beings have. To be made in God's image means that man and woman at creation were perfect like God. They were without sin and with a perfect knowledge of God. In fact when God finished all of his creative acts, he said that they all were "*very good.*"

In addition to his body, God gave man and woman a living soul. Only to mankind did God give both a body and a soul. No other visible creature has such a soul.

Besides being specially made and created in the image of God, man was given rule over all the earth and what is in it. He was to take care of the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, over livestock, the earth and all the creatures that move on the earth. What a tremendous responsibility God had given to mankind.

But today, because of sin, everything is changed! We do not always take care of God's creation as we should.

We abuse the beautiful world God created. We pollute the air with dark smoke and fumes. We dirty the rivers with waste water. We scatter trash in our cities and in the countryside. We kill wildlife and cut down trees without replacing them.

We have not been good caretakers of God's creation as we should have been. Our world is NOT the beautiful creation as God made it.

Nor are we responsible caretakers of our own bodies. We abuse our bodies when we eat, drink, or smoke to excess. We destroy our bodies when we use drugs. We are not the perfect creatures that God created.

Instead of abusing our bodies and the world, we should be thankful to God. We should thank him for our health. We should take good care of our bodies. We should praise God because we have been fearfully and wonderfully made. No other creature can think as we do. No other creature can use its hands as we do. No other creature has a soul as we have.

Life is a gift of God. Through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we one day will return to God who gave us life. May we then raise our voices in praise to God saying, "*O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!*"

**FOR FURTHER STUDY, READ GENESIS
CHAPTERS ONE AND TWO
IN YOUR BIBLE.**

***God created man
in his image.
Male and female
created he them.***

GENESIS 1:27

THE PROMISE IS MADE

Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin.

ROMANS 5:12

WHEN GOD CREATED man and woman, he gave them unique qualities and a definite role in life. They were to complement each other in a wonderful way. They were to form a family. But Adam was led into sin by Eve who was tempted by the devil. Terrible consequences fell upon the world and mankind as a result. Let's learn how this all happened.

After God created the world, he placed our first parents into a beautiful garden. It is known as the Garden of Eden. It must have been a very wonderful place. All kinds of trees pleasing to the eye and good for food grew there. A flowing river, giving water to man, to animals and to plants, ran through the garden. Adam and Eve were happy. Work was not a drudgery, but a joy.

However, God gave Adam one command. He told him he should not eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil found in the middle of the garden. God said that Adam would surely die if he ate some of its fruit.

An angel who became sinful, called Satan, then enters upon the scene. Satan questions Eve. He causes her to doubt God's statements. He even lies. Satan tempts her saying, "*You will not surely die. God knows that when you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you will be like God.*" Well, Eve saw that the fruit on the forbidden tree was good to eat. So she ate some. Then she gave some of the fruit to Adam. And he also ate. They had disobeyed a simple command of God. They had sinned. They had brought the condemnation of God on themselves and the world they lived in. They immediately died spiritually and at a later time they died physically.

The consequences of the fall into sin of Adam and Eve were evident and are with each of us today.

You and I no longer possess the image of God. We are no longer sinless but we are sinful. We no longer know God perfectly.

God knew what had happened. He put Adam and Eve out of the garden as punishment. He told Adam that now he would have to work hard. Toil would be painful. And it is today, isn't it? Thorns and thistles would grow in Adam's fields. And they do today, don't they? He said to Adam that his body would return to the dust from which it was made. And our body does the same when we die, doesn't it? God told Eve that she would bear children painfully. And that is so, isn't it? He told her that her husband would rule over her. And that is the way it is today.

But God is not only a just and righteous God. He is also a merciful and forgiving God. He gave to Adam and Eve, and to all us sinners, a wonderful, blessed promise. He promised to send a Savior. He said that the Savior would crush the head, that is, the power of Satan. In the process, however, the Savior would be hurt. That Savior, promised so long ago, is none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God. By suffering, dying and rising again from the dead, he frees mankind from the guilt of sin, the fear of death, and the power of Satan.

You and I are in need of that Savior. When we are born in this world, we are sinful human beings. We inherit that condition of sinfulness from our first parents Adam and Eve. Then in our everyday lives, we actually commit many other sins. We fail to keep God's commandments. When we lie, steal, curse, have evil desires, hurt our neighbor, make other things more important than God, we sin. We have sinful thoughts. We speak sinful words. We commit sinful deeds. As a result you and I deserve eternal death in hell. Hell is a place of eternal torment.

Our comfort is to know that God kept the promise to send a Savior. We learn about that Savior in the Bible.

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MAN'S FALL INTO
SIN, READ GENESIS CHAPTER THREE
IN YOUR BIBLE.**

*I will put enmity
between you and
the woman, and
between your
offspring
and hers.*

GENESIS 3:15

THE PROMISE IS KEPT

FROM THE TIME that God first gave the promise to Adam and Eve until the Savior actually was born, many centuries of time passed. During that time, God sent numerous special messengers called prophets to encourage God's people. The people longed for and looked for the coming of that Savior. The prophets provided many word pictures telling God's people who that Savior would be and what he would do. With ever increasing frequency and greater clarity they spoke about the fulfillment of the promise. Then when the time was exactly right, like a flash of lightning and the roar of thunder on a clear summer day, the Savior of mankind was born.

He was born two thousand years ago in a small village called Bethlehem in the land of Israel. He was born to a virgin named Mary. He was born in a lowly stable because there was no other place to sleep in all of Bethlehem.

Angels from heaven announced this wondrous birth to shepherds. The Bible tells us that the shepherds were afraid at seeing an angel. But the angel calmed their fears. The angel said, "*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*"

God had kept his promise. He had sent a Savior. This fulfillment of the promise is a very special person. He is both true God and true man in one person. He is one together with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

We know he is true God because the Bible tells us he was present at creation. He is almighty and without sin. God the Father, on two occasions, even calls him "*the Son whom I love.*"

At the same time he is also a real man. He needed to eat and sleep. He had a human body and human feelings.

But in one way he was different from all human beings. Even though he too was tempted by the devil, he did not sin. He was holy and righteous all through his life.

When this Savior, named Jesus, was thirty years old he began to teach and preach the good news. Many people came to hear and to see him.

*Today in the
town of David a
Savior has been
born to you;
He is Christ
the Lord.*

LUKE 2:11

They came because he spoke with authority. Often in his teaching he used parables, earthly stories with a spiritual meaning. One of these parables is the story of a man sowing seed in his field. Some falls on the path and the birds eat it. Other seed falls on rocky soil. It begins to grow but dies because it lacks moisture. Some falls among thorns which grow up and choke the plants. Still other seed falls on good ground. It grows and yields a bountiful crop.

Jesus then explained this parable. He said the seed is the Word of God. There are people who hear the Word but then the devil comes and takes the Word from them so they cannot believe and be saved. Then there are those who hear the Word with joy and believe for a while. But when they are faced with troubles, fall away. They are like the shallow soil on the rock. The seed that fell among the thorns is the Word in the hearts of those who hear the Word but their faith is choked out by the worries, riches and pleasures of this world. Finally, the Word of God falls on the hearts of many who believe in Jesus as the promised Savior, live godly lives, and are saved. We want the seed of the good news about Jesus to fill our hearts with faith, don't we?

Jesus also performed many miracles. Such miracles are mighty acts which only God can do. They are performed to prove that Jesus is the almighty Son of God. He showed his power over the elements by calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee. He showed his power over illness by healing the sick, the deaf, and the blind. Yes, he even showed his power over death by raising Jairus' daughter, the widow's son at Nain, and his friend Lazarus from the dead.

This Jesus, whose name means Savior, is the one promised by God to Adam and Eve. He is also your Savior. It is through the good news of the Bible that you learn about what he has done to save you. May the good seed fall on your heart that you may believe in Jesus, the Son of God, and that you might have eternal life through his name.

**READ ABOUT THE SAVIOR'S BIRTH IN LUKE
CHAPTER TWO IN YOUR BIBLE.**

***The Spirit of the
Lord is on me,
because he has
anointed me to
preach good news
to the poor.***

LUKE 4:18

JESUS FULFILLS THE PROMISE

WHY? Why was Jesus, the eternal Son of God, willing to leave the glory of heaven to come to earth? Why was he, who was rich, willing to become poor and live among men? The answer can be found in one word - LOVE! God the Father loved the world and sent his Son to live among us. Jesus so loved us that he willingly paid the price for our many sins by his suffering and death.

Jesus certainly suffered for us. The religious leaders of his day desired to kill Jesus. They hated the message of forgiveness and love that he preached. They would not believe that he is the Son of God. Therefore with thirty pieces of silver they bribed one of Jesus' disciples, Judas, to betray the Savior. In a garden called Gethsemane, just outside the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus was praying, he was captured. He was taken to be tried before the religious court. He was condemned for saying he was the Son of God. But the Jews could not put anyone to death. Jesus was sent to the court of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. There Jesus was mocked. He was cruelly whipped and crowned with sharp thorns. Pilate wanted to release Jesus because he considered him innocent, but the crowd cried out, "*Crucify him, Crucify him.*"

Jesus was crucified, that is, nailed to die on a cross, together with two thieves just outside the walls of Jerusalem on a hill called Golgotha. While dying on the cross, Jesus spoke seven times. He spoke words of forgiveness for those crucifying him. He showed love by placing his mother, Mary, into the care of John, a disciple whom Jesus loved. He promised a place in heaven for one of the dying thieves. After suffering for many hours on the cross he cried, "*It is finished.*" Jesus had completed the work he had come into the world to do. He was punished for all of the sins of all mankind, including yours and mine, by his innocent suffering and death. When Jesus died, the earth shook. The Roman army officer in charge of the crucifixion said, "*Surely this was the Son of God.*"

Jesus' friends buried him in a nearby tomb. A stone was rolled in front of the grave's door. The

*God so loved
the world that
he gave his one
and only Son.*

JOHN 3:16

governor placed a seal on the rock, and a guard of soldiers at the entrance so no one could steal the body.

But death nor guards could keep Jesus in the grave. Long before this and several different times he had told his disciples that he would rise alive from the grave. And so it was.

It was early Sunday morning that today we know as Easter when some women who followed Jesus walked to his grave. They wondered, "*Who will roll away the stone?*" But when they came near, the women saw the stone was rolled away. The guards were gone. What they saw was an empty grave. What they heard was the voice of an angel. The angel had a joyful message, "*You are looking for Jesus. He is not here. He is RISEN as he said. Come and see where he lay and go quickly and tell the disciples that he is alive.*"

What joy filled the hearts of the women, the disciples, and all that heard this message. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who became a man to suffer and die in our place, has triumphantly risen from the dead. He is alive.

For forty days Jesus continued to show himself alive to many people including over five hundred persons at one time. Then while raising his hands in blessing, in the presence of his disciples, Jesus slowly and majestically ascended into heaven. There he is with God the Father in the highest position of power and honor until he visibly comes again on Judgment Day.

What joy should also fill your heart. Your Savior suffered and died for you. As your substitute he bore the punishment for your sins. Jesus rose again to prove he is truly God. Through his resurrection you are justified, that is, your sins are forgiven. This is the promise God makes to you today. Share that promise. The angel told the women, "*Go and tell others that Jesus is alive.*" So may you also tell others the good news that Jesus is alive and their Savior also.

*You are looking
for Jesus who
was crucified...
He has risen!*

MATTHEW 28:5,6

**MATTHEW CHAPTERS 27 AND 28 SPEAK OF
JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION.**

THE PROMISE-YOU ARE JUSTIFIED

"*WHAT must I do to be saved?*" That was the question a frightened jailer asked the Apostle Paul many centuries ago. It is a question asked by many people today. "What must I do to be saved?" There is nothing you can do. God has done it all. He saved you through Jesus Christ. He gives you the promise--your sins are forgiven. You are justified.

What does it mean to be justified? Justification is a judicial act of God whereby he declares you righteous for Christ's sake. By one man, Adam, sin entered the world and death by sin. Likewise, by one man, Jesus Christ, the whole world was declared righteous. When Jesus died on the cross, he carried with him the sins of all mankind. The Bible tells us, "*The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.*" Having paid the punishment for our sins by his death on the cross, Jesus triumphantly rose from the dead. Again, the Bible states, "*Jesus was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification.*"

God justifies, that is, forgives our sins solely because of his grace. The Bible reminds us, "*For it is by grace you have been saved.*" Grace is the undeserved love of God. In love God sent his Son into the world just as he promised Adam and Eve when they sinned. It was by grace that God's Son, Jesus, was willing to live a perfect life on earth and to die an innocent death on the cross. He did all this as your substitute. He did it in your place. The Bible tells us that "*grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*"

So, you see, it was not by what you did or do but what God already has done through Jesus Christ that saves you. And how do you make this salvation your own? By faith in Jesus Christ. "*For it is by grace you are saved through faith,*" is what the Bible says.

Faith is also a gift of God. Faith in Jesus as your Savior is the trust, the confidence, that you have in him. When a Christian says, "I believe," it means that he trusts in God and is certain that all of God's promises will be fulfilled. This faith enters our hearts and lives through the gospel, the good news, as found in God's Word and in the sacrament of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

*We are justified
freely by
his grace.*

ROMANS 3:24

By the grace of God and through faith, which is God's gift, we are justified, declared holy in God's sight. Our sins are covered by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. As a result, God no longer looks at our sins but on Jesus' righteousness. Thus God declares us righteous and just for Christ's sake.

In other words, God has done everything. We can do nothing. And that is what God tells us in the Bible, "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, - and this not from ourselves, it is the gift of God - not of works, so that no one can boast.*"

Contrary to these clear words of God, many people reject this perfect righteousness by trying to earn it by their own good works. But their works are worthless because God does not need or want our good works to save us. The answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" is--nothing. "*Believe in Jesus Christ*" is the real answer. Even that faith is a gift of God through the promise of the gospel.

Now every believer can be certain of God's forgiveness because it does not depend on anything man does. If it did, we could never be sure we are saved because we could never be certain we had done enough good deeds to satisfy God. Now the believer can be sure of salvation because our forgiveness depends entirely on what Jesus Christ has already accomplished.

Your wonderful purpose in life then is, first of all, to learn about the good news concerning Jesus from the Bible. Then, secondly, you will want to share that good news with your friends, relatives and neighbors. Tell them that God has done it all. Tell them we are justified, forgiven, by God's grace, through faith in Jesus, the Savior.

*By grace you
have been saved
through faith.*

EPHESIANS 2:8

**YOU LEARN MORE ABOUT BEING
JUSTIFIED IN ROMANS CHAPTER
THREE IN YOUR BIBLE.**

THE PROMISE-YOU HAVE PEACE

GOD the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. We have learned about the Father and especially his work of the creation of the world and mankind. We have read about Jesus Christ, God's Son and all he did to save us. But what about the Holy Spirit? What has he done for us?

Briefly stated, the Holy Spirit is true God together with the Father and the Son. They are one. They are equally powerful and holy. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that is also of great importance to us.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit, first of all, to call you to believe. He calls you out of the unbelieving world by the gospel in the Word of God and the sacraments. By nature you are spiritually dead. The Holy Spirit gives you spiritual life. You lived in the darkness of sin. The believer now lives in the light of the promise.

The second important thing the Holy Spirit does is to give the believer many wonderful spiritual gifts. We have already learned about the gift of the forgiveness of sins. But there are many other gifts.

You and I now have peace with God. We do not have to be afraid of God. We learn that he is a loving, forgiving God. "*The fruit of righteousness will be peace,*" the Bible tells us.

You and I have hope. Our everyday lives are filled with many hopes. A small child may hope to go to school. A young person may hope to find a faithful husband or wife. An older person may hope to have good health. But the Holy Spirit gives us a greater hope. He gives us the hope of eternal life in heaven. God's Word reminds us, "*We wait for the blessed hope-the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*"

You and I have a life filled with joy. When we become discouraged and even despondent because of what is happening in our lives, through the gospel our spirit is lifted up. We look to God for help knowing he will hear our prayers. As a result, our lives can be filled with joy. We read in the Bible, "*We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, But we also rejoice in our sufferings.*"

*Being justified
we have peace
with God
through our Lord
Jesus Christ.*

ROMANS 5:1

You and I have comfort. When days of sorrow enter our lives, we can listen to the comforting words of our God in the Bible, "*My Comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise renews my life.*"

Besides giving us many spiritual gifts, the Holy Spirit leads us to hate sin and to be eager to live a holy life filled with good works. A good work is anything that a believer does according to God's Word out of love and thanks for all of God's goodness.

As a result of our faith in Jesus, we will be kind and forgiving to others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us. We will want to be patient with our fellowman. Gentleness too is a characteristic of a believer. We will want to control our tempers, our evil desires, and our excess in personal evil habits. All of these virtues are part of the life of a believer created through the work of the Holy Spirit using the gospel in our lives.

But there is yet one other work which the Holy Spirit carries out in our lives. The devil, the unbelievers in the world, and our own sinful nature try to weaken our faith. They try to keep us from doing good works. It is the Holy Spirit who strengthens our faith. He renews our faith to do God's will and keeps us in the faith throughout our lives until we enter the eternal joys of heaven.

God wants you to be saved. Therefore, you need to hear God's Word. You need to study the Bible. You need to let the Holy Spirit create faith in your heart and cause you to lead a Christian life. Let that Word shine brightly in your heart. If you do not have a Bible, get one. If you have a Bible, read it. Especially in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John you learn about the good news of Jesus. He has the words of eternal life for you.

**YOU ARE ENCOURAGED TO READ ROMANS
CHAPTER FIVE IN YOUR BIBLE.**

***My power is
made perfect
in weakness.***

**II CORINTHIANS
12:9**

THE PROMISE LEADS TO ETERNAL LIFE

*"I am the way,
the truth and
the life," Jesus
answered.*

JOHN 14:6

IF A MAN dies, will he live again? In answer the atheist says, "No." The philosopher says, "Maybe." Only a believing child of God with determination and certainty can answer, "Yes." A believer can say yes because he bases his answer on faith in Jesus Christ.

It was Jesus who promised, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."* Shall never die? Haven't we stood at the grave of a dead loved one? Don't we see death waiting for us too?

Certainly our bodies must die and be placed in a grave. But, as we learned, man also has a soul. Death is the separation of the soul from the body. The soul lives on after the body dies. The soul of the unbeliever is delivered to a place of endless punishment called hell. There it remains with the devil and the evil angels. There it endures eternal torment.

The soul of the believer, on the other hand, goes immediately to heaven, the place of God's special presence. There it lives with God and all the believers as well as with the holy angels.

On the last day of this world, Jesus will come again to judge all the living and the dead. On that day the bodies of all who have died will rise from the dead. They will be reunited with their souls. On the one hand, the body and the soul of the unbeliever will be sent to the eternal torments of hell. On the other hand, the glorified body and soul of the believer will live eternally in the joys of heaven.

We don't know exactly what heaven will be like. But the Bible does tell us many things about what it will be like in heaven. It tells us that we will be in the presence of Jesus. Heaven will be a place of great joy and happiness. In heaven there will be no more pain or sorrow or death or crying because all the evil we experienced on earth will be gone. It will be a place of eternal pleasure. There we will be reunited with all our loved ones who have died in the faith of Jesus Christ.

In heaven our voices will join those of the holy angels around God's throne. We will sing the

praises of our God and Savior and say, "*Worthy is the lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.*" Together with the angels we will join in joyfully singing, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty who was, and is, and is to come.*" With anticipation, every believing child of God should look forward to that day when we shall be in heaven together with our Savior.

There is one question, then, that you need to answer. If you were to die tonight, where would you go? Would your soul enter heaven or hell? And if you came to heaven, why should God permit you to enter? Remember God demands perfection in your life. He said, "*You shall be perfect for I the Lord your God am perfect.*" What does God see in your life? He sees sin. God warns us, "*The soul that sins shall die.*" Many people deny that they are sinners. They try to save themselves by boasting, "I am better than others. I try to do what is right." But God tells us, "*By the deeds of the law, there shall no man be justified,*" or forgiven. What can you do? God has done everything for your salvation. God saves you through Jesus Christ. Jesus came "*to seek and to save those who are lost.*" Jesus lived a holy life in your place. Jesus died for you on the cross bearing your punishment. Now God declares you righteous for Christ's sake. God's promise to you is, "**BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS AND YOU WILL BE SAVED.**"

**FOR A PICTURE OF HEAVEN PLEASE READ
REVELATION CHAPTER SEVEN IN YOUR
BIBLE.**

PRAYER

Dear God, in your Word you teach me many things. I learn that I am a sinner. I know that I need a savior. You have shown me Jesus Christ. He is my Savior. By the power of the gospel used by the Holy Spirit, I ask you to open my heart and mind. May I always believe in Jesus Christ. Through him lead me to eternal life in heaven. In Jesus' name I ask this. Amen.

*God will wipe
away every tear
from their eyes.*

REVELATION 7:17

(Back Cover)

Author:

Harold A. Essmann

Artwork:

Patrick McCrae

Layout:

Mark Brunner

**FOR MORE
INFORMATION**

Write to or contact:

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE,
NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION
Copyright © 1984 International Bible Society

Copyright © 1998-WELS-BWM
(Fourth Edition)
(Seventh Printing 2005)
PRINTED IN U.S.A.
Catalog No. 38-7055