

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 1 of 20

Last week we aired the first half of this message, and we conclude it today.

This transcript includes the entire text of both broadcasts.

On this Sunday morning of Christmas weekend, turn with me in your Bibles, please, to the book of Second Peter, chapter one. I'd like to read the entire chapter, but we're going to be focusing on one particular phrase in one verse. So let's hear the Word of the Lord together:

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 2 of 20

patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory,

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 3 of 20

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

And Father, we thank You that as we open this Book this morning, we open the only book of its kind in the entire universe. The only supernatural Book. The inspired Word of God. Infallible. Inerrant. Trustworthy in every detail. And Father, as we look into Your Word this morning, we pray that You would encourage our hearts to trust You more, to gain a greater grasp of Your faithfulness, as we're reminded of the truths that we think about at this time and this season. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

"Exceeding Great and Precious Promises"

On this Sunday morning of this Christmas weekend, I believe it's fitting for us to consider something that's already been mentioned, and that we've already sung about, and that is the promises of God. In verse three of the passage we just read,

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 4 of 20

Peter calls them, "exceeding great and precious promises." In the original Greek it literally reads, "the very greatest and most highly prized promises."

And in verse 12 Peter says, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and you are established in the present truth." Still, I want to remind you.

And in verse 15 Peter says, again, I want you "to have these things always in remembrance," even after I've gone home to glory. I won't stop reminding you, says Peter, as long as I'm here.

Here in Second Peter chapter one, Peter is giving his readers what we can rightly call an apologetics lesson. Back in First Peter chapter 3, verse 15, he told them to "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." Be ready to give an answer.

And here again, in Second Peter, he is telling them, I want you to be ready to give an answer.

People are going to ask you, "Why do you believe the Bible?" "How do you know the Bible is true?" The answer, Peter says, is this: Because God always keeps His promises.

People are going to ask you, "How do you know that Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only Way, the one and only Truth, the one and only Life? How can you be so

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 5 of 20

sure of that?" The answer, Peter says, is the same: Because God always keeps His promises.

People are going to ask you: "Why are you living the way you live? Why is it different?" (And I trust that they notice that your life *is* different.) The answer, Peter says, is the same once again: I am endeavoring, by the grace of God, to live a life that pleases God, because God always keeps His promises.

And so this morning, on this Christmas weekend, I want to put you in remembrance, just like Peter two thousand years ago. Christmas is all about one thing: It is the fulfillment of the exceeding great and precious promises of God, in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Prophetic Word "Made More Sure"

And so I want to focus our attention this morning, out of all that we read for the sake of context, on one short phrase at the beginning of verse nineteen. This phrase is our theme this morning, and it is going to be our jumping-off point to consider, in very brief and capsule form, the ways in which the promises of God are fulfilled in the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, two thousand years ago. That little phrase at the beginning of verse 19 says this: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy." "We have also a more sure word of prophecy." In the original language it actually reads like this: "We also have the prophetic word made more sure." "We also have the prophetic word made more sure."

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 6 of 20

What exactly does Peter mean by this? What is it, that is "more sure"? What's the comparison that he's making? We need to make sure we understand that. Well, there are three possibilities.

One of them we can eliminate right away. Obviously he's not saying that prophecy is more sure than cunningly devised fables, as he speaks of them in verse 16. That would not prove anything about prophecy.

So, what about a second possibility? Is he saying that the word of prophecy is more sure than the witness and testimony of the apostles? Peter talks about the fact that he, and James, and John saw Jesus transfigured, and they heard the voice of the Father from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Is Peter saying that prophecy is more sure than that? Well, verse 19 eliminates that possibility as well, because Peter says, "we have *also*" the prophetic word made more sure. In other words, we have something *in addition* to even the eyewitness accounts of the apostles.

This brings us to the third possibility, and it's really the only one that fits the text and the context as the Holy Spirit has given it to use through Peter. Peter's point is that the word of prophecy that was given to Israel in ancient times has become "more sure" in the light of what has taken place. We have the word of prophecy *itself* made more sure.

How has it been made more sure? By its fulfillment. It has been established. It has been substantiated, proven, demonstrated, confirmed, verified – *by fact*. God

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 7 of 20

always keeps His promises – and He keeps His promises in, and through, and because of, Jesus Christ. That is the focal point of the message of Christmas: “We also have the word of prophecy made more sure.”

In other words, the Old Testament really can only be understood in terms of the person and work of Jesus Christ. That’s why the veil is still there, for the unsaved Jewish reader who reads the Old Testament. The unsaved Jewish reader does not read the Old Testament in terms of Christ. You have to look back at the Old Testament with Christian eyes, with the light of the fulfillment. The Old Testament is a Book of types, and foreshadowings, and promises. Everything in it is of a temporary nature. The whole of the Old Testament is a Book of types and expectation, Israel seeking and waiting and looking for something. Now the great statement which Peter makes here in chapter one is that Christ in His coming upon earth is the fulfillment of all things and everything.

“Yea and Amen” – Promise and Fulfillment

I’d like for you to keep your finger in Second Peter, and turn with me just for a moment to Second Corinthians chapter one, verse twenty. In 2 Corinthians 1:20, Paul says this: “All the promises of God in Christ are ‘Yes,’ and in Him, ‘Amen’.” There in the Old Testament are the promises; there is the “Yes.” God’s affirmative: This is what I am going to do. And in the person and work of Jesus Christ we have the answer, the “Amen” – the confirmation, the substantiation, and the fulfillment of everything God promised through His Old Testament prophets.

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 8 of 20

And think about the very detailed nature of that fulfillment. It would be amazing enough if there were a general similarity between the person and work of Jesus Christ and the things promised in the Old Testament. If there were just general similarities, that in itself would defy the odds. But what we have is not just a kind of a general fulfillment. There is a detailed and a precise fulfillment. It is a fulfillment that can only be explained by the fact, as Peter says at the end of chapter one, that the men who wrote these prophecies were writing under the inspiration of God. And the person and work of Christ are the focal point of their prophecies.

And that is where I want to focus our attention this morning. The birth of the Son of God, the person and work of Jesus Christ on earth two thousand years ago, this is the ultimate proof that God always keeps His promises. And so this morning, I simply want to put you in remembrance of these things, as Peter says. I know that for most of us, this is not new ground. It's familiar territory. But we need to be reminded. This is the greatest kind of encouragement for a Christian – to remind ourselves of the absolute certainty of the Word of God, and the absolute certainty of the promises of God.

Of course we don't have the time this morning to get into all the details. We could do an entire semester of Bible classes just studying all of the prophecies that were fulfilled when Jesus Christ came into this world the first time. So the best we can do this morning, if you will, is to fly over the landscape of the Old Testament at about 30,000 feet, if you will, and point out the mountain tops and some cities. And I'm going to refer to a lot of passages that time won't permit us to turn to, but I trust

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 9 of 20

that this brief survey, this short reminder course, if you will, that this will be an encouragement to your hearts in these trying times. And after our brief survey, I want to end with some words of personal application and encouragement.

We're going to very quickly, just spending a minute or two on each one, we're going to cover ten points this morning, ten things that demonstrate that God kept His promises in the first coming of Christ. We're just going to spend a minute or two on each of them. This is by no means an exhaustive list. But I want to give you the list first, and then we'll come back and consider each one briefly:

- First, God kept His promise about *the lineage of Jesus Christ*.
- Second, God kept His promise about *the place of Jesus' birth*.
- Third, God kept His promise about *the nature of Jesus' birth*.
- Fourth, God kept His promise about *the time of Jesus' birth*.
- Fifth, God kept His promise about *the words that Jesus would speak*.
- Number six, God kept His promise about *the works Jesus would perform*.
- Number seven, God kept His promise *that Jesus would defeat Satan*.
- Number eight, God kept His promise *that Jesus would be a prophet greater than Moses*.
- Number nine, God kept His promises *about the week of Jesus' crucifixion*.

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 10 of 20

- And number ten, God kept His promise *that Jesus would make full and final atonement for sin.*

So now let's come back and focus briefly on each one of these.

1. God Kept His Promise about the Lineage of Jesus

To what tribe does Jesus belong? The answer is, of course, "The tribe of Judah." Of which particular family or house in that tribe? The answer is, "The house of David." Now you remember in the Old Testament it had been prophesied that it was out of the tribe of Judah and out of the house of David that the Messiah, the Deliverer, would come. Not after the line of Levi, but a priest after the order of Melchizedek, out of the line of David. A King and a Priest combined.

A thousand years before His birth, and even prior to that, the promise had been made that He would be of the tribe of Judah and the house of David. And so a child is born who is the living verification of that promise. God kept His promise about the lineage of Jesus.

2. God Kept His Promise about the Place of Jesus' Birth

Where? Bethlehem. And you know, that particular detail shows up only in the book of Micah. The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. And you will remember that when the Lord was born, the wise men came to Herod, looking for the Messiah, the One who was to come. And because Herod, who was an Edomite and not even a Jew, didn't understand exactly why they had come, but he knew it was a threat. He

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 11 of 20

consulted the Jewish authorities, and they told Herod that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, according to prophecy. They knew the prophecy. God kept His promise about the place of Jesus' birth.

3. God Kept His Promise about the Nature of Jesus' Birth

Isaiah 7:14, the great prophecy: "A virgin shall conceive and bear a son." And in chapter nine Isaiah said that a child would be born, but that a Son would be given, that distinction being made. And His name would be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Jesus did not come in the line of Adam. He did not come through conception by sinful human flesh. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Galatians chapter four, verse four, Paul sums up the fulfillment of the promise of God: "In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." God kept His promise about the nature of Jesus' birth. A miraculous birth.

4. God Kept His Promise about the Time of Jesus' Birth

Secular writers put it this way. They say that from a human standpoint, from the standpoint of what they call the philosophy of history, there was probably no time in the history of mankind when the coming of the Son of God, was less likely than the time when Jesus came. It was actually the time when, in Biblical terms, the sceptre seemed to be departing from Judah. But as we look at the Old Testament, we find that that was precisely what had been prophesied hundreds of years before.

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 12 of 20

In the days to come, when it seems that the day has come when things are at last slipping away, when the sceptre seems to be departing out of the hand of Judah, then the real King will come.

And then we have the great prophecy of the ninth chapter of the Book of Daniel – the prophecy of the seventy weeks. And there you have it, down to the minutest detail, a statement beforehand of the exact timing of Christ's coming, the point in world history when it would happen. There is extraordinary accuracy in that prophecy and in its fulfillment. God kept His promise about the time of Jesus' coming. It was, indeed, "in the fullness of time."

5. God Kept His Promise about the Words that Jesus Would Speak

We're getting even more specific now. We don't have time to read it this morning, but Isaiah chapter sixty-six tells us that the Messiah would speak certain words and He would also do certain things. And then we come over to the Book of Luke, chapter four, beginning at verse sixteen, and we find Jesus coming into the synagogue at Nazareth, and He's given the scroll of the Book of Isaiah, and He opens it up, and He reads those words from Isaiah's prophecy and He closes the book, and He says to the people, "This day this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." The One spoken of by Isaiah is here, before your very eyes. The very words He spoke, His method of speech, His manner of teaching, all down to the minutest detail – all these actions were predicted and prophesied. God kept His

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 13 of 20

promise about the words that Jesus would speak, and the way in which He would say them.

6. God Kept His Promise about the Works Jesus Would Perform

The Old Testament prophesied His works, His miracles. We read in Isaiah chapter thirty-five that He would open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf, and the lame would leap as a deer, and the dumb would sing. And of course you come to the New Testament and you find Jesus, over and over and over again, doing those very things.

And we remember, in Matthew chapter eleven, John the Baptist was in prison, and he was in this period of uncertainty in his mind, and he sends two disciples back, to ask Jesus, "Are You the One, or do we look for another?" And what does Jesus tell them? What is His answer? He says, "Tell John again the things which you hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, and the deaf are made to hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them." Here Jesus points John and his disciples directly back to that thirty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, and He says, "God is keeping His promise in Me." God kept His promise about the works that Jesus would perform.

7. God Kept His Promise That Jesus Would Defeat Satan

We know that immediately when man fell into sin, God began making promises of salvation. The serpent had entered God's perfect creation, he had beguiled man,

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 14 of 20

had caused man to fall into sin. But God in His infinite grace immediately gave the promise of salvation, Genesis 3:15: "The seed of the women shall bruise the serpent's head." Four thousand years before the birth of Christ, we have the original promise of salvation, the promise of salvation that is also, inherently, the promise of Satan's defeat.

And when Christ was born in Bethlehem the promise was carried into action. The seed of the woman had arrived, and He proceeded to bruise the head of the serpent. And Paul sums it up in Colossians 2:15 – He "disarmed principalities and powers, made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in His cross." The cross was not a defeat. It was a victory. God kept His promise that Jesus would defeat Satan.

8. God Kept His Promise That Jesus Would Be a Prophet Greater Than Moses

In the third chapter of Acts, Peter, preaching after the Day of Pentecost, reminded the people of Israel that Moses had said this: Moses told the children of Israel in the wilderness, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me." And that was what the nation of Israel looked forward to, through the centuries. They called it "the coming of the Prophet". That's the term in which they spoke of it. "The coming of the Prophet. The coming of the Holy One." That was what John the Baptist meant when he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the One who is to come?" They were looking for the Prophet. They were looking for the One who would lead them in a much greater exodus than the deliverance from Egypt. Moses, back there in the wilderness, was saying this, in

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 15 of 20

effect. He was saying, I have led you out of your bondage in Egypt. I have led you through this wilderness from Egypt to Canaan. But this is just a picture of another, greater Prophet who shall come. He will lead you out of your bondage to sin. And there in the Christ of Bethlehem we have the Prophet, the One who was long expected and long looked for. The problem is that "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the power to be called the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." God kept His promise that Jesus would be a Prophet greater than Moses.

9. God Kept His Promises about the Week of Jesus Crucifixion

Let me just briefly remind you of a handful of things in that week. There are so many details that are covered in the prophets, and fulfilled in the New Testament. Much of the content of the Gospel accounts focuses on the details of that last week. The first, of course, is the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Zechariah even mentions the details of a donkey and the foal of a donkey, and the rejoicing and the shouting.

And Psalm 69 prophesied that Jesus would cleanse the temple. And Zechariah also prophesied that Jesus would be sold for thirty pieces of silver. And then, of course, we have the detailed descriptions of the sufferings of Christ on the cross – Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22. The very fact that His hands and feet were to be pierced was prophesied. Everything is there in great detail, about a form of execution that would not even be invented until hundreds of years later.

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 16 of 20

And also we have the fact that Jesus would be buried in a particular place, that His grave should be made with the wealthy, prophesied in Isaiah 53. And of course, when the time came He was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy man.

And of course, God kept His promise, that He would not permit His Holy One to see corruption. He would raise Him from the dead. David prophesies it in Psalm 16, and Peter and Paul, at different places in different sermons in the Book of Acts, both remind us of the fact that God kept His promise, and the writer of Hebrews reminds us of it as well.

And then finally...

10. God Kept His Promise That Jesus Would Make Full and Final Atonement for Sin

Throughout the Old Testament, from the time of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel onward, we find a constant stream of offerings and sacrifices for sin. We find a very detailed set of rules and regulations in the Mosaic law – the blood of bulls and of goats, the offering of a lamb, the scapegoat, and so on. The Day of Atonement. But all of it is temporary. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives us the New Testament commentary on that Old Testament prophecy when he puts it this way, chapter ten, verse four: "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins." It is all a temporary covering over, a type

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 17 of 20

and a symbol that looked forward to a future great offering, a great final sacrifice that would really satisfy God, once and for all.

The types and the shadows of that great offering to be made, run right through the Old Testament. And then it is fulfilled, at last, in Jesus Christ. Hebrews chapter ten, verse twelve, sums it up: "This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God."

You know, I knew a man – I didn't know him personally, but I had correspondence with him – and I read a chapter, a testimony that he contributed to a book. He was a Roman Catholic priest. And one Sunday morning, he was standing up in front of the congregation and they were doing the Mass, and his assistant read this passage, Hebrews chapter ten, verse twelve: "This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God." And God the Holy Spirit "got him" that morning. He realized the truth. And he turned around from the Mass, from the altar to the people, and he said, "This is useless! It's been done, once, forever by Jesus Christ!" And he was gloriously saved that day, just by that one verse of Scripture.

Here at last is the One who would serve as the perfect High Priest, being born of a virgin, laid in a manger, touched throughout His life with the feeling of our infirmities, tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. And having entered into the holiest of all with an offering and a sacrifice – His own blood – He represents us *forever*. He "saves to the uttermost all who come to God by Him."

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 18 of 20

Christian, What Does This Mean for You?

Now, we've just hit the high points this morning. It's like, in the last half hour, we've flown coast to coast at 30,000 feet and about a thousand miles an hour. We saw some big cities, we saw some mountain ranges, but there was so much more detail that we could have gotten into, but there's just not time.

But the point of it all is this: *The message of Christmas is that God keeps His promises.* Every one. Every detail. Without exception. Nothing left out. No loose ends. Everything that God has ever promised is being fulfilled. The first coming of Jesus Christ is a great declaration of the immutability, the unchangeability, of the counsel of God. God's Word is fixed. It's absolute. It's eternal. As the writer to the Hebrews says it, God has fulfilled the oath that He Himself took, in order that we might have such assurance and consolation.

As we close this morning, I want to say just a few words of application.

The first is this. Everything that God promised about the first coming of Jesus Christ was carried out literally. There's no spiritualizing about it. It was literally fulfilled. But we know there's more to come. In the rest of the Book of Second Peter, Peter's focus is actually on the Second Coming of Christ. And his focus is on answering doubters about the Second Coming of Christ.

He says, God is not slack concerning His promise. The day of the Lord is coming. Just as surely as God kept every promise – literally – about the first

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 19 of 20

coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, He will keep every promise – literally – about the Second Coming of Christ. And so, Peter says, in chapter three, “We according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” Keep looking up. Jesus is coming again.

And let me lastly say this. The fulfilled promises of the first coming of Jesus Christ are the proof that God's Word is the one thing that you can always trust. There are “exceeding great and precious promises” in this Book. There are promises to you when you are sick. There are promises to you when you suffer the loss of a loved one. There are promises to the widow. There are promises to the fatherless and the orphan. There are promises to you when you are in every kind of physical and material and spiritual need. There are promises to you when you go through the deep waters and the fiery trials. Temptations. Testings. There are promises to you when you are in such anguish of soul that you don't know what to do or which way to turn.

Turn to the Book. Turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. There are promises for you. Every conceivable condition, every conceivable situation in which you can ever be, is covered by the sure promises of God.

And so this morning, let me just close by urging you to lean on God's promises. Rest on His Word. Take them to heart. Make them yours. I know that we could have a testimony meeting where so many, many of you would speak of God's

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "Christmas: God Always Keeps His Promises" (complete message)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/19/2010

Page 20 of 20

promises at work in your life. Walk with Christ in the Spirit, because God always keeps His promises.

The coming of Jesus Christ into the world substantiates it all, and proves it all. God has given His Word, and you can take Him at His Word. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." Thanks be unto God for the One in whom all the promises of God are "Yes" and "Amen" – promised, and fulfilled – without any shadow of a doubt.

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