



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

BIBLE CONFIDENCE SERIES

Promise or Pattern?

How to tell the difference when the New Testament uses the Old Testament

The short answer

A promise tells us what God says He will do. A pattern is a real person, event, role, or institution that God later brings to a greater fulfillment. Some passages include both, so the goal is not to force a label but to read carefully.

“For however many are the promises of God, in him is the ‘Yes.’”

2 Corinthians 1:20 WEB

Simple · Clear · Scripture-grounded



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WELCOME

You do not have to guess

This Companion was not written to replace your Bible. It was written to help you fall in love with it. Every page is intended to send you back into God's Word with greater confidence, deeper understanding, and a clearer picture of Jesus Christ. If, after using this Companion, you spend more time reading your Bible than reading these pages—then it has accomplished its purpose.

Foundational truth

The Bible is not merely a book to be understood. It is God's self-revelation, given so that people may know Him through Jesus Christ.

What you will learn

01

What a promise is

Recognize words and settings in which God commits Himself to a future action, person, blessing, judgment, or restoration.

02

What a pattern is

Recognize real earlier people, events, roles, and institutions that later Scripture connects to a greater fulfillment.

03

How to test a connection

Use both passages, the Bible's storyline, and the New Testament's explanation rather than relying on resemblance alone.

START HERE · Recommended order

1. How the New Testament Uses the Old Testament • 2. What Does Fulfilled Mean? • 3. Promise or Pattern? Together, the three guides move from the broad framework to this practical distinction. This guide may also be used on its own.



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Two simple definitions

Promise

A promise is a commitment God makes. It may concern something near to the first hearers, something future, or an unfolding purpose that reaches its fullness in Jesus.

Pattern

A pattern begins with something real in history. A later person, event, role, or institution follows the same God-directed shape and brings it to a greater or final expression.

Many of the richest connections in Scripture involve promise and pattern working together. These categories help us notice how a connection works; they are not rigid boxes.

A quick comparison

PROMISE	PATTERN
Spoken beforehand God commits Himself to a future action, person, blessing, judgment, or restoration. Ask: What did God commit to do?	Lived beforehand A real earlier person, event, role, or institution forms a God-directed shape that later becomes greater. Ask: What earlier reality is repeated or completed?

Beginner memory anchor

A promise is spoken beforehand. A pattern is lived beforehand. Both may lead us to Jesus, but they do so in different ways.



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WORKED EXAMPLE 1

Promise: the ruler from Bethlehem

Read Micah first

Micah speaks during a time of corrupt leadership and coming judgment. In that setting, God promises a ruler from Bethlehem who will shepherd His people and whose greatness will reach far beyond Israel (Micah 5:1–5).

Then read Matthew

When the wise men ask where the King of the Jews will be born, the chief priests and scribes point to Micah's words. Jesus is born in Bethlehem, and Matthew identifies Him as the promised ruler (Matthew 2:1–6).

Why this is a promise

Micah looks ahead to a coming ruler. Matthew records the arrival of that ruler and connects the promise directly to Jesus.

What to notice

- The promise appears within a larger message of judgment and hope.
- Matthew quotes the prophecy and applies it to Jesus.
- The point is larger than a birthplace: Jesus is the promised Shepherd-King.

Memory anchor

Promise: God said a ruler would come. Fulfillment: Jesus came as the promised ruler.

A second clear promise: the new covenant

God promises a new covenant in which He will forgive sin and write His instruction on His people's hearts (Jeremiah 31:31–34). At the Last Supper, Jesus identifies the cup with the new covenant in His blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Hebrews explains that His saving work establishes it, and Paul describes new-covenant ministry as the work of the Spirit (Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20; 2 Corinthians 3:4–6; Hebrews 8:6–13; 9:15).

Why this is a promise

Jeremiah explicitly announces what God “will” do. Jesus identifies His sacrificial death as the means by which that promised covenant is established.



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WORKED EXAMPLE 2

Pattern: “Out of Egypt I called my son”

Read Hosea first

Hosea 11:1 looks backward to the exodus. God loved Israel, called the nation His son, and brought His people out of Egypt. In Hosea’s setting, this line remembers a past event; it is not introduced as a prediction about a future child.

Then read Matthew

Matthew records that Joseph took Jesus to Egypt and later returned. Matthew says this fulfilled Hosea 11:1 (Matthew 2:13–15).

Why this is a pattern

Israel, God’s covenant son, came out of Egypt but failed in faithfulness. Jesus, God’s unique Son, also comes out of Egypt and faithfully completes the path Israel failed to walk.

What to notice

- The earlier event was real history, not an invented symbol.
- Matthew—not imagination—directly establishes the connection.
- The later reality is greater: Jesus faithfully embodies Israel’s calling.

Memory anchor

Pattern: Israel came out of Egypt. Greater fulfillment: Jesus relives and completes Israel’s story.



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[MORE EXAMPLES](#)

Patterns may involve events, people, and roles

Passover and Jesus

The Passover lamb belonged to Israel's real deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 12). The New Testament identifies Christ as our Passover and connects His saving death with that earlier pattern (1 Corinthians 5:7; John 19:36).

Adam and Jesus

Adam was a real person whose disobedience brought sin and death. Paul calls Adam “a foreshadowing of him who was to come” and presents Jesus as the obedient representative who brings righteousness and life (Romans 5:12–19; 1 Corinthians 15:45–49).

Priesthood and Jesus

Israel's priests truly served under the Old Covenant. Hebrews explains that their repeated ministry anticipated Jesus, the lasting High Priest whose once-for-all sacrifice fully addresses sin (Hebrews 7:23–28; 10:1–14).

What healthy patterns have in common

- Begin with the earlier person, event, or institution in its own setting.
- Confirm that later Scripture establishes or strongly develops the connection.
- Notice how the later fulfillment advances God's redemptive story.
- Recognize how Jesus is greater than the earlier pattern—not merely a copy of it.



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SOMETIMES THE ANSWER IS BOTH

Promise and pattern can overlap

Biblical connections do not always fit one tidy label. God may give a promise through an earlier event, or a repeated pattern may carry promises forward.

David's son and David's throne

God promises David that his offspring will succeed him and that his throne will be established (2 Samuel 7:12–16). Solomon is a near fulfillment: he is David's son, rules after him, and builds the Temple. Yet Solomon's reign does not exhaust the promise.

The prophets continue to look for a righteous Davidic ruler (Isaiah 9:6–7; Jeremiah 23:5–6). The New Testament announces Jesus as the Son of David whose kingdom will have no end (Luke 1:31–33; Acts 13:22–23).

Promise

God explicitly commits Himself to David's house and kingdom.

Pattern

David and Solomon form a royal pattern that helps us recognize the greater and everlasting King.

A careful conclusion

When categories overlap, explain what the text shows instead of arguing over a single label. The labels serve the reading; the reading does not serve the labels.



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A BEGINNER-FRIENDLY TEST

Five questions can keep you grounded

01

What did the earlier passage say?

Read the paragraph or chapter and summarize its message before jumping ahead.

02

Is there an actual promise?

Look for a commitment God makes, not merely a statement that sounds meaningful.

03

Is there an actual pattern?

Identify the real earlier person, event, role, or institution and its place in God's story.

04

Who makes the connection?

Give greatest confidence to connections established by Jesus, the apostles, or clear biblical development.

05

How is the later reality greater?

Ask how Jesus fulfills, completes, or surpasses what came before.

If you are unsure

It is faithful to say, "This may be a connection, but I need to study it further." Humility protects us from turning interesting similarities into claims Scripture never makes.



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READ WITH CARE

Four mistakes to avoid

01

Calling every prediction a pattern

If God clearly promises a future person or event, name the promise instead of avoiding its forward-looking meaning.

02

Calling every similarity a pattern

Two details that look alike do not automatically form biblical typology. Look for textual and storyline support.

03

Ignoring the first meaning

A Christ-centered connection should honor what the earlier passage communicated in its own setting.

04

Making the label more important than Jesus

The goal is not to master categories. The goal is to understand God's Word and see His saving work more clearly.

A faithful balance

Read the Old Testament in context. Read the New Testament in context. Follow the connection Scripture gives, and state your confidence honestly.



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WANT TO DIG DEEPER?

A few ideas for growing readers

This section is optional

The beginner guide is complete without this page. Continue when you are ready for intermediate ideas.

Typology is a pattern with biblical warrant

The word type describes an earlier reality that anticipates a greater one. Romans 5:14 explicitly calls Adam a type of the One to come. Hebrews also develops people, sacrifices, and sacred spaces as patterns fulfilled in Christ. Responsible typology follows Scripture's own connections rather than assigning hidden meanings to every detail.

Promise may unfold in stages

A promise can have a near expression and a greater completion. The promise to David had a real historical expression in Solomon and the kings who followed, yet it reaches its lasting fulfillment in Jesus. Some aspects of Christ's kingdom are already present, while their final visible fullness awaits His return (Luke 1:31–33; 1 Corinthians 15:24–28).

A pattern is not free-form allegory

A pattern grows from real history and the Bible's unfolding story. Free-form allegory assigns symbolic meanings without clear textual support. Scripture may use symbolism, but readers should not invent a secret meaning for every number, object, or action.

Christians may weigh some proposed patterns differently

Some connections are stated directly; others are reasonable but debated. Distinguish a clear biblical claim from a theological inference, and allow the strength of the evidence to shape the strength of your wording.

Deeper-study guardrail

Technical terms should help you read more carefully, not make you dependent on a system. Keep returning to the full passages.



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PRACTICE PAGE

Is it a promise, a pattern, or both?

Earlier passage

Reference: _____

What did it communicate in its original setting? _____

Later passage

Reference: _____

What connection does the later passage make? _____

My conclusion

☐ Promise ☐ Pattern ☐ Both ☐ Another kind of connection ☐ Unsure

What evidence supports that conclusion? _____

How is Jesus or the later reality greater? _____

One-sentence memory anchor

A promise is spoken beforehand; a pattern is lived beforehand; and both must be understood through the context and connections Scripture provides.

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THE MOST IMPORTANT PLACE TO BEGIN

Would you like to begin with Jesus?

The Bible's message is good news. God created us to know Him, but every one of us has sinned and fallen short of His glory (Romans 3:23). Sin separates us from God, and we cannot repair that relationship through good works, religion, or effort.

God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lived without sin, died for our sins, and rose from the dead. Through Him, God offers forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal life as a gift of grace (Romans 5:6–8; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4; Ephesians 2:8–9).

How do we respond?

01

Turn toward God

Repentance means turning from sin and self-rule toward God. It is not becoming perfect before you come to Him (Acts 3:19).

02

Believe in Jesus

Trust that Jesus is Lord and that His death and resurrection are sufficient to save you (John 3:16; Romans 10:9–10).

03

Call on Him

Speak to God honestly. Confess your need, place your trust in Jesus, and ask Him to forgive you and lead your life. "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13 WEB).

A prayer can express your faith

Jesus, I know that I have sinned and cannot save myself. I believe You died for my sins and rose again. I turn to You, ask for Your forgiveness, and trust You as my Savior and Lord. Help me follow You and grow in Your Word. Amen.

A prayer is not a magic formula—the words themselves do not save us. Jesus saves everyone who truly comes to Him in faith. If you have trusted Christ, begin reading His Word, tell another faithful Christian, connect with a Bible-believing local church, and learn about baptism and discipleship (Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 2:38–42).