

CHAPTER VIII
THE PROMISE-DOCTRINE AS TAUGHT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the preceding chapters it has been asserted that the thing which differentiates the monotheism of Yahweh from other religions is its doctrine of the Messiah. Other religions, it may be, have their Messiahs, but ours is different from the others, and this difference is the really distinctive element. Of this assertion I offer no proof except our examination of this same doctrine of the Messiah, but we shall find, I think, that this is sufficient.

For clearness of thought we need to begin by sharply perceiving the differences of meaning among the three terms, "messianic prediction," "messianic prophecy," "messianic doctrine" taught by the prophets. The first of these terms is narrower than the other two. The second and third really describe different aspects of the same fact.

Provided we remember this, messianic prediction is a good term. We have been taught that the prophets uttered predictions of a coming Deliverer; that these were fulfilled in the events of the life and mission of Jesus; and that this proves, first, that the prophets were divinely inspired, and second, that the mission of Jesus was divine. All this is true if rightly understood, but full of difficulty if we stop here. It is correct procedure, when correctly carried out, to select passages from the Old Testament in which specific facts are foretold concerning the Messiah, and then show, from the history, that these marks characterized Jesus, that he is therefore the Christ, and that prediction, thus made and fulfilled, is a mark of supernatural knowledge, authenticating revealed religion. But if we go at it in this way we are liable to misconceive the terms we use in our reasoning. And we mislead ourselves if we imagine this to be an exhaustive study of messianic prophecy, or even of the much narrower subject, messianic prediction.

Some persons, pursuing these studies, have been struck with the great variety and the apparently disconnected character of what are commonly regarded as messianic predictions, coupled with the remarkable fact that, diverse as they are, they all meet in the history of Jesus, so that what would otherwise be heterogeneous and unintelligible is thus seen to have a common end, and becomes intelligible. Thus, it is said, the gospels become the key to the prophecies, opening the meaning of things that were otherwise obscure. Considerations of this kind are regarded as giving especial strength to the argument from messianic predictions.

This reasoning is valid within its own proper limits. But it suggests another point. If we really have here a wide and varied body of instances, capable of being shown by induction to have a common value, then the suggestion is that as they thus converge toward a single fact, so they may originally have diverged from a single fact. If further study shall thus discover in them a unity at the beginning, as well as at the end, their value as evidence will thereby be increased. And this is what further study actually discovers. The more adequate idea is not that of many predictions meeting in one fulfilment, but that of one prediction, repeated and unfolded through successive centuries, with many specifications, and in many forms; always the same in essential character, no matter how it may vary in its outward presentation or in the illustrations through which it is presented.

Messianic prophecy is doctrine rather than prediction. The prophets were preachers. If there was some one messianic prediction which they repeated and unfolded from age to age, we should expect that they would present it in the form of a religious doctrine, for the practical benefit of the men of their times. We Christians preach the facts concerning Jesus Christ. On the basis of these facts we ask men to repent of sin, to obey God, to seek their own

highest good, to receive help against temptation, and comfort in distress. Had the prophets any doctrine that they could preach for the accomplishment of these and other like ends? There can be no doubt that they had. Their foretelling of the Christ stands on a different footing from all their other predictions, just as the biography of Jesus, in the New Testament, is on a different footing from all other matters of fact there recorded. As the biography of Jesus is really doctrine rather than biography, and is the heart of the apostolic Christian doctrine, so the prophetic forecast of the Messiah is doctrine rather than prediction, and is the heart of the religious teachings of the prophets.

Certainly we should treat their utterances as predictive; but this by itself is inadequate. They teach a doctrine concerning God's purposes with Israel, intelligible in each stage of Israel's history, so as to be the basis of religious and moral appeal for that age, but growing in fullness from age to age until it becomes the completed doctrine of the Messiah.

In other words, we are accustomed to a generalization of what the prophets say concerning the Messiah, which was devised to meet the needs of our theological systems. One need find no fault with this. But if we could substitute for it a strictly scriptural formula of generalization, there would at least be a gain in the way of freshness of statement. Is there a scriptural way of stating this matter? And if so, what is it?

The proposition that the Old Testament contains a large number of predictions concerning the Messiah to come, and that these are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, may be scriptural in substance, but it is hardly so in form. The bible offers very few predictions, save in the form of promises or threatenings. It differs from the systemized theologies in its not disconnecting prediction from promise or threatening. We shall find that it also differs from some of them in emphasizing one promise rather than many predictions. This is the prevailing note in both Testaments—a multitude of specifications unfolding a single promise, the promise serving as a central religious doctrine.

This biblical generalization of the matter may be thus formulated: *God gave a promise to Abraham, and through him to mankind; a promise eternally fulfilled and fulfilling in the history of Israel; and chiefly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, he being that which is principal in the history of Israel.* In the present chapter we are to consider this doctrine as taught in the New Testament.

The most prominent thing in the New Testament is its proclamation of the kingdom and its anointed king. But it is on the basis of the divine promise that its preachers proclaim the kingdom, and when they appeal to the Old Testament in proof of Christian doctrine, they make the promise more prominent than the kingdom itself.

I. First, the men of the New Testament hold that a doctrine of the Messiah, the Anointed one, in the form of a record of a promise made by Deity, appears in all parts of the Old Testament scriptures.

They say that this doctrine is taught not in selected passages only, but throughout the scriptures. Jesus in the Emmaus incident reminded his disciples that all things must needs be fulfilled which were written concerning him “in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms.” In the same passage it is said of him:

“And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lc. xxiv. 44, 27).

That this statement is typical no one will dispute. Under the general fact, which it affirms, we note a few specifications.

1. In the first place, the New Testament men regard the messianic teaching of the Old Testament as mainly the unfolding of a single promise (e*paggeli*a). However scholars may have neglected this aspect of the view they present, it is the one which they themselves bring to the front.

Paul, on trial for preaching Jesus as the Messiah, risen from the dead, said to Agrippa:

“And now I stand to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; whereunto our twelve tribe nation, strenuously serving night and day, hopeth to attain; and concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, O King” (Acts xxvi. 6-7).

It was on such an occasion as this, if ever, that Paul would formulate most carefully the central article of his creed. Evidently he has weighed his words and made them exact. The messianic hope, he says, is based on the promise; not some promise or other, but the promise. He founds his appeal to Agrippa not on a good many scattered predictions, but on the one promise; and he expects Agrippa to understand him. Speaking of his hope as a Christian, he describes it as “the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers,” and he speaks of the twelve tribe Jewish nation as hoping to attain to this promise. The thing he is speaking of he calls, not prediction, but promise; not promises, but promise; not a promise, but the promise. The word he uses is singular and definite. The whole essential messianic truth, as he knows it, he sums up in this one formula, “the promise made of God unto our fathers.”

The context here sufficiently indicates what promise is meant; and Paul's words are to be interpreted by the fact that the offence for which he stood accused was his teaching that the promise was for the gentiles as well as the Jews. But, waiving these points, we just now only note that Paul here speaks of “the promise.” Similar phraseology abounds in the New Testament appeal to the Old Testament. Nearly forty passages that contain this word “promise” might be cited, besides many that touch the matter in other ways. And these passages in which the doctrine of the one promise is found are the central, conspicuous passages of the New Testament. They affirm that all revelation concerning the Messiah is the unfolding of the one promise. Into this mould all the New Testament teaching on the subject may readily be cast. This is the way in which the men of the New Testament themselves generalize the messianic statements they make, this in distinction from all the other ways that have been devised.

2. In the second place, the New Testament writers do not leave us in doubt as to the identity of the one promise which they regard as summing up the hope of those who believe in Christ. They identify it for us as the promise that was made to Abraham when God called him, the promise that in him all the nations of the earth should be blessed. With this transaction in mind the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of God's having “made promise to Abraham,” says of Abraham that “having patiently endured, he obtained the promise,” and that God's oath was given to show “unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel” (vi. 13-15, 17). He speaks of Isaac and Jacob as “heirs with him of the same promise.” And of “these all” he says that they:

“received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us” (Heb. xi. 9, 39-40).¹

¹ “For when God made promise to Abraham,... he swore,... Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And thus, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise.... God, being minded to show more abundantly unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel, interposed with an oath” (Heb. vi. 13-15, 17).

“By faith he became a sojourner in the land of^{promise}, as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (Heb. xi. 9).

In a similar strain Paul says to the Romans that “the promise to Abraham or to his seed” was “not through the law,” “but through the righteousness of faith,” and that unless this is so “the promise is made of none effect.” He adds concerning Abraham, that “looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief” (iv. 13—14, 20).²

3. In the third place, the New Testament writers speak of promises, using the word in the plural, but not in such a way as to weaken what has just been said concerning their doctrine of the one promise.

Very rarely they use the word without the article. For example, certain worthies are spoken of “who through faith . . . obtained promises,” that is, promises of some sort or other (Heb. xi. 33). But most of the instances are in contrast with this, the definite article being used—for example, the following from Romans:

“Who are Israelites; whose is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service, and the promises” (Rom. ix. 4).

“Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that he might confirm the promises [given] unto the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written” (Rom. xv. 8-9, followed by four quotations in succession, in reference to the Gentiles).

Here the thing spoken of is not promises in general, but “the promises.” The definite article is used. A recognized specific group of promises is indicated, and it is identified as the Abrahamic group. That is, “the promises” here intended are precisely the same thing that we have heretofore found spoken of in the singular as “the promise.” The one promise is capable of being thought of as divided into specifications, and when so thought of, the plural number is used.

Similar instances are frequent in the book of Hebrews. We are exhorted to “be not sluggish, but imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (vi. 12).

We read:

“Yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten [son]” (xi. 17).

It said of Abraham and Sarah and their predecessors:

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises” (xi. 13).

The new covenant is called, in contrast with the old,

“a better covenant . . . enacted upon better promises” (viii.6).

In these and like instances the use of the plural is simply a recognition of the fact that the one promise includes many specifications.

4. In the fourth place, this one promise, with its specifications, the New Testament men regard as the theme of the whole Old Testament.

² “For not through the law was the promise to Abraham or to his seed, that he should be heir of the world, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise is made of none effect” (Rom. iv. 13-14).

“For this cause it is of faith, that it may be according to grace; to the end that the promise may be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham (16).”¹⁸³ It is said that Melchizedek blessed “Abraham . . . him that hath the promises” (vii. 6).

They trace the unfolding of it throughout the history of Abraham's descendants, identify it with the promise made later to Israel, and still later to David, and regard it as having been continually fulfilled, but likewise as always moving forward to larger fulfilment

Stephen is represented as beginning his oration before his accusers with the statement:

“The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and Stephens said unto him, Get thee out of thy land, and from thy view of the kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew matter thee” (Acts vii. 2).

From this beginning Stephen traces down through the events recorded in the Old Testament a doctrine which he evidently intends to identify with the doctrine of the Messiah as held by Christians. When he reaches the period of the exodus, he says:

“But as the time of the promise drew nigh, which God vouchsafed unto Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt” (17).

That is to say, he represents the promise made to Abraham as being fulfilled, in its proper time, in the events of the exodus; though he regards it as still holding on, after the exodus, for further fulfilment

Paul, in his speech in Antioch of Pisidia, adopts the same method, beginning, however, with the exodus.

Following the history down, he comes to the time of Saul the king of Israel, and adds:

“And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be. their king;... Of this man’s seed hath God according to promise brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus” (Acts xiii. 22—23).

Evidently Paul, like Stephen, regards the messianic revelation as a process extending through the history of Israel, so that it is proper to cite the facts of that history in explaining how it came about that Jesus is the Messiah.

The hymns cited in. the first two chapters of the Gospel according to Luke are saturated with the same idea. They speak of the events connected with the births of John the Baptist and Jesus as proving that the Lord remembers:

“his holy covenant; The oath which he sware unto Abraham our father” (i. 72-73).

But they also speak of the same events as the Lord's having:

“raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of his servant David” (69).

In doing this they identify the promise made to and through Abraham with the promise made later to and through David.

If additional instances were needful, we might add all the numerous New Testament passages in which the Christ is directly or indirectly spoken of as the son of David.

5. In the fifth place, they not only trace the promise through the Old Testament, but make the Old Testament phraseology a part of their own diction.

In their teachings concerning the promise they employ peculiar terms brought over from the Old Testament, in some cases modifying the terms by the use they make of them; for example, kingdom, Messiah, servant, son, mine elect, holy one, and the like. They also bring over a good many peculiar forms of representation: the last days, the day of the Lord, my messenger, the Spirit, ceremonial types, biographical types, the prophet as a type, Jehovah's day of judgment, and the like. Most of these will be discussed in subsequent chapters. At present we only note that such phraseology exists.

II. If now we have firmly grasped the idea that the men of the New Testament base everything on the one great promise which they found in the beginning of the old scriptures, and which they regarded as radiating thence all through those scriptures, we are prepared to proceed to a study of the use they make of this promise.

1. First of all, they regard the promise as eternally operative, and as irrevocable, and they emphasize this.

The author of the book of Hebrews says:

“For when God made promise to Abraham, since he could swear by none greater he swore by himself.”

“Wherein God, being minded to shew more abundantly unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel, interposed with an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong encouragement” (Heb. vi. 13, 17-18).

Note how strongly the eternal operativeness of the ancient promise is here affirmed. In the eleventh chapter of Romans, the chapter in which Paul affirms that though “a hardening in part hath befallen Israel” (25), yet God has not cast off his people, the irrevocability of the old promise is presupposed throughout,³ and is explicitly stated in the words:

“For the gifts and the calling of God are not repented of” (Rom. xi. 29, marg. of RV).

And yet more forcible, if such a thing can be, is Paul's language to the Galatians:

“Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it hath been confirmed no one maketh it void, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed.... A covenant confirmed beforehand by God the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after, doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise; but God hath granted it to Abraham by promise” (Gal. iii. 15—18).

And in a score of passages which I have cited or shall cite to prove other points, this same thought of the eternity and immutability of the promise is magnified.

2. As a second point, the men of the New Testament claim that Jesus Christ is the culminating fulfilment of the ancient promise, so that, in preaching him, they are preaching the promise.

We have noticed above that Paul, in his address at Antioch, follows down the history of the promise from the times of the exodus; and we have found him reaching the point where David appears in the history, and then speaking of “a Saviour, Jesus,” as coming from Israel, from the seed of David:

“Of this man's seed hath God according to promise brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus” (Acts xiii. 23).

He makes this lead up to another statement:

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers, how that God hath fulfilled the same unto our children, in that he raised up Jesus” (32-33).

That is, Jesus is the fulfilment of the promise made to the patriarchs and to David.

We have just considered the statement made to the Galatians concerning the promise-covenant that cannot be disannulled. Paul insists upon that, not on account of its abstract importance, but because, as he says, he and his fellow-believers have a direct interest in it. And here again he leads up to a specific statement:

³ In particular, one does not completely understand the allusion to Isaiah (Rom. xi. 26-27), unless he has in mind the clauses which in Isaiah follow the ones cited:

“This is my covenant with them, saith Yahweh: My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith Yahweh, from henceforth and forever” (Isa. lix. 21)

“The scripture hath shut up all things under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (Gal, iii. 22).

Here Paul speaks of the Abrahamic promise as “the promise by faith in Jesus Christ.”

With the apostles this is a common way of speaking. The whole eleventh chapter of Hebrews might be cited in proof of this assertion. We cited from the sixth of Hebrews, a moment ago, certain words concerning God's oath to Abraham, and the two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie. The author is insistent upon the promise thus authenticated, in order that he and his fellow-Christians may claim a share in it. He makes the statement for the purpose of enforcing the exhortation:

“that each of you may show the same diligence unto the fullness of hope even to the end; that ye be not sluggish, but imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. vi. 11-12).

He carries his thought forward to the conclusion that:

“we may have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us; . . . that which is within the veil; whither as a forerunner Jesus entered for us” (Heb. vi. 18-20).

We might quote in addition a long list of passages (e.g. Gal. iii. 6-9, 26-29). The more one studies such utterances in their contexts, the more he sees the reason for the intense interest which the men of the New Testament take in the eternity and the immutability of the promise. They regard it as the charter of all the rights which they and their successors may possess as Christians.

3. Further, they claim especially that the salvation of the gentiles through Christ comes under the promise. They make it emphatic that God's promise to Abraham was for the nations, and therefore conveys title to the gentiles, under which they may receive the gospel. Paul says to the Galatians:

“And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, gave the gospel beforehand⁴ unto Abraham, [saying], . . . In thee shall all the nations be blessed” (iii. 8).

In this sentence Paul affirms three things: that the giving of the gospel to Abraham was a giving of it before-hand; that the substance of the gospel thus given was in the words, “In thee shall all the nations be blessed”; that this promise, given to Abraham, is the same gospel by which the nations are saved in Jesus Christ.

Paul says further to these gentile Christians:

“And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise” (iii. 29).

And again:

“That upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (iii. 14).

He makes the same claim, in different language, in the fourth chapter of Galatians:

“The [son] by the handmaid is born after the flesh; but the [son] by the freewoman through promise.” “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise” (iv. 23, 28).

And to the Ephesians Paul says that “the gentiles are . . . fellow-partakers of the promise”; that the Ephesian gentile converts have ceased to be “strangers from the covenants of the promise”; that they “were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise.”⁵

⁴ The versions translate “preached beforehand.” The word is *proenag-geli*zomai*, not *prokhrm*ssw*. The statement that the scripture *evangelized* Abraham beforehand means, I suppose, that it preserves the record of the gospel as announced to him. But in any case the contents of the Old Testament are here described as a giving of the gospel.

⁵ “In whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise” (i. 13).

4. Yet further, the men of the New Testament trace a connection between the promise and the several great doctrines of the gospel.

(a) They connect it with their proclamation of the kingdom of God, on earth and in heaven, and so with the universal and eternal reign of Christ as prince of peace. This statement scarcely needs proof. Any one can verify it by means of a concordance.

(b) In view of the eternal and irrevocable character of the promise, their doctrine of the kingdom easily carries the promise idea with it as it passes into the eschatological teachings of the New Testament.

In many passages, both those which mention the coming of the Lord and others, they closely connect the promise with the doctrine of the resurrection and of future reward. The second Epistle to Timothy opens with these words:

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus.”

In 2 Peter we are told that:

“the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, . . . the day of the Lord will come as a thief” (iii. 9-10).

And we are warned against those who say:

“Where is the promise of his coming?” (iii. 4).

Paul before Agrippa, arguing the promise given to the fathers, asks the question:

“Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead?” (Acts xxvi. 8).

In I John we read:

“Ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise which be promised us [even] the life eternal” (ii. 24-25).

And in Hebrews:

“He is the mediator of a new covenant, that . . . they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (ix. 15).

And again:

“For ye have need of patience, that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise” (x. 36).

(c) They connect the promise with the gift of the Holy Ghost that marks the new dispensation.

Paul writes to the Galatians:

“That upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (iii. 14).

Peter is reported to have said on the day of Pentecost:

“Repent ye, and be baptized . . . ; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off” (Acts ii. 38-39).

Peter is here speaking of the ancient promise, though he does not explicitly connect it with Abraham.

“Ye, the Gentiles . . . were . . . alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise” (ii. 11-12).

“That the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (iii. 6).

These two instances will serve to interpret others. It is not necessary to think that the speaker is always thinking of Abraham when he uses the word "promise." This mode of conception and of diction, once established, would maintain itself. But the reference to the ancient record is real, whether direct or indirect. When Jesus was about to part from his disciples at his ascension, he said:

"And behold I send forth the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city until ye be clothed with power from on high" (Lc. xxiv. 49).

"He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father," adding, "But ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts i. 4-5).

Peter refers to this in the words:

"Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath poured forth this which ye see and hear" (Acts ii. 33).

(d) Finally, they connect Abraham, the recipient of the promise, with what they have to say concerning redemption from sin; and in particular with their doctrine of justification by free grace, through faith.

In Genesis we are told that Abraham "was wont to believe God, and he counted it righteousness to him." This utterance is made central by the apostles, not merely in their theology, but in their messianic theology. Paul and James alike cite the words, and insist upon them (Jas. ii. 21-23; Rom. iv. 2-5, 9, 10). Paul declares that:

"it was not written for his sake alone, . . . but for our sake also, who believe on him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification" (Rom. iv. 23-25).

He draws the inference:

"Even as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Know therefore that they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham." "So then they which be of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham." "If ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (Gal. iii. 6-7, 9, 29, and the whole chapter).

We have thus seen that the men of the New Testament find a messianic doctrine pervading every part of the Old Testament. In their minds it takes the form of the one promise. They identify it as the promise made to Abraham for the nations. They recognize the particulars included in it as "the promises." They trace it throughout the Old Testament. They appropriate the phraseology in which the Old Testament speaks of it. Further, they preach this promise as the one great thing they have to preach; emphasizing its irrevocability, claiming that Jesus Christ is the culminating fulfilment of it, basing upon it the hope of salvation for the gentiles, connecting it with the whole body of the doctrines of the gospel.

The passages which describe the promise to Abraham, his faith as related thereto, the experiences that arose from it, are those which the men of the New Testament cite more prominently than any others as sources concerning the Messiah. In these recent centuries Christian scholars have busied themselves with the important doctrines of justification and election as taught in the New Testament comment on these passages, and have largely overlooked the messianic part of it. What the New Testament here principally teaches is that Christ is the perfect realization of this promise as made to the patriarchs, and as renewed to Israel later, particularly in the times of Moses and of David. The Christ is the goal of the mission of Israel. In him the line of David is eternal. His kingdom is David's everlasting kingdom.

We cannot dismiss this survey of the facts without calling attention to one very important bearing of it. It offers the basis for a genuine Christocentric theology. As men employ this term, it is sometimes a mere euphemism for a theology from which everything has been omitted save a few glittering generalities concerning Christ. I for one have no use for such a theology as that. But the apostolic world-view that has been traversed in this chapter is certainly Christocentric. It is Christ to whom the promise points forward. It is on account of its containing Christ that the promise is cited with so much reiteration, and not for anything it contains apart from Christ. The promise passages connect themselves with everything that is essential in Christian doctrine. They outline the nature and the person of Christ. The theology of the Holy Spirit is in them, he being the divine Agent in carrying out the promise. They are a study in the doctrine of the divine decree, that decree having Christ as its determinative point. The whole of this line of teaching is true to the summary of it given in the Epistle to the Ephesians:

“Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth” (i. 9-10).

The Calvinistic theology is Christocentric in fact, even if not in form. Perhaps some theologian will arise who shall succeed in discovering a dogmatical rearrangement into a system that shall be Christocentric in form as well as in fact. At all events, the theology of the promise, as it appears in the New Testament, is Christocentric.