

ROYAL EXPECTATIONS IN
GENESIS TO KINGS:
THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

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Summary

This article explores two related issues in Biblical Theology: (a) the relationship between the testaments, and (b) the New Testament belief that Jesus Christ fulfils Old Testament expectations concerning a divinely appointed royal saviour or messiah. These issues are discussed from the perspective of the books of Genesis to Kings which, as a continuous narrative, form the backbone of the Old Testament. While many contemporary writers view these books as providing an account of Israel's history (the reality of which is debated), a careful reading reveals that they are equally interested, if not more so, in the fulfilment of divine promises centred on a future king through whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. According to the New Testament, the realisation of these promises, foreshadowed in the Genesis-Kings narrative, comes through Jesus Christ.

I. Introduction

As an academic discipline Biblical Theology is especially interested in the organic unity of the writings which comprise the Old and New Testaments. This raises two important and closely related issues. First, there is the question of the relationship between the two testaments. David L. Baker outlines well the nature of this problem:

Christianity has the New Testament as the record and testimony of the life, death and resurrection of its founder, Jesus Christ, and of the formation of the Christian church. One of the most fundamental questions which has faced theology and the church in every age and still demands an answer today is whether or not Christianity also needs an *Old* Testament. Is the Old Testament to

be thrown away as obsolete, or preserved as a relic from days of yore, or treasured as a classic and read by scholars, or used occasionally as a change from the New Testament, or kept in a box in case it should be needed some day? Or is the Old Testament an essential part of the Christian Bible, with continuing validity and authority alongside the New Testament?¹

Such questions highlight well the important and unresolved issue of the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament.

Second, fundamental to the New Testament understanding of Jesus of Nazareth is the idea that he fulfils Old Testament expectations regarding a divinely-appointed royal saviour or messiah. While Christians, by definition, are those who believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the messiah predicted in the Old Testament, there has been a growing tendency since the eighteenth century to challenge the validity of this claim. This trend, which may be traced back to the writings of the Deist Anthony Collins,² has depended heavily on the observation that many of the supposedly messianic Old Testament proof-texts quoted in the New Testament are not messianic according to the 'plain meaning' of the Hebrew text. As a result there has arisen a substantial scholarly consensus (a) that many Old Testament passages previously assumed to be messianic actually relate to ordinary kings, and (b) that the expectation of a future messiah originated first in the post-exilic period, following the demise of the Davidic dynasty.³

In spite of these developments the Old Testament's witness to the messiahship of Jesus continues to be an important factor in defining the relationship between the testaments. With some justification Baker includes 'Christology' as one of five concepts that

¹D.L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible: A Study of the Theological Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (revised ed.; Leicester: Apollos, 1991).

²A. Collins, *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons for the Christian Religion* (London, 1724); *idem*, *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy Considered* (London, 1727).

³This position is exemplified in the influential study of S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (ET; Oxford: Blackwell, 1956).

may be used to explain the theological relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Given, however, the doubts that have been expressed regarding the use of supposedly messianic Old Testament passages in the New Testament, alternative ways of explaining the relationship between the testaments have gained popularity. Thus, alongside Christology, Baker highlights as significant the concepts of salvation history; typology; promise and fulfilment; continuity and discontinuity. While Baker's study provides a helpful survey and critique of modern approaches to the problem of the theological relationship between the testaments, there is scope for refining and developing various aspects of his discussion. In order to do this we shall focus our attention on the books of Genesis to Kings.

II. The Books of Genesis to Kings

Various factors have influenced my decision to restrict my observations to the books of Genesis to Kings, and it may be helpful to mention briefly the more important of these. First, these books may legitimately be viewed as forming the backbone of the Old Testament. Not only do they make up almost half of the Old Testament in terms of length, but, as we shall observe more fully below, in their present form they constitute a unified narrative. Second, in marked contrast to their prominence within the Old Testament, the books of Genesis to Kings usually play a minor role in discussions regarding the messianic nature of the Old Testament; most proof-texts tend to be drawn from the prophetic books (*i.e.*, the Latter Prophets) and the book of Psalms.⁴ Consequently, we may legitimately ask, if no witness to Christ is present in Genesis to Kings, or, if it is very limited, can one maintain that messianic ideology is a major aspect of the Old Testament as a whole? Although modern Old Testament scholarship does not favour a messianic reading of the books of Genesis to Kings, it will be argued

⁴We see this reflected, for example, in W.C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology; Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Zondervan/Paternoster, 1995).

below that the content of these books is central to understanding how the Old Testament witnesses to Christ. This also has important implications for the way in which we should view the relationship between the testaments.

For the purpose of this study we shall adopt a synchronic reading of Genesis to Kings. From the perspective of their final redaction it is obvious that these books were intended to be read as a unified narrative. This is apparent both in terms of the overall picture provided, and of the way in which individual books are linked together. Viewed as a whole, Genesis to Kings records selected events from the creation of the earth to the demise of the Davidic monarchy at the time of the Babylonian exile. Later books in the sequence presuppose that the reader is already familiar with those that have gone before. For example, the introductory verses of Exodus assume that the reader is acquainted with the story of Joseph. Similarly, references to the deaths of Moses and Joshua at the very start of the books of Joshua and Judges respectively serve the purpose of linking these books with those immediately preceding.⁵ Whatever the prior oral and/or literary history of these books they have been deliberately linked together to form a continuous narrative, and, on the basis of content and language, we may with reasonable confidence assume that this material was brought together in the exilic or early post-exilic period.⁶ For present purposes there is no need to determine a more specific date for the final redaction of these books.

By adopting a synchronic reading of Genesis to Kings, we avoid the necessity of unravelling the process by which these books

⁵To these examples many others could be added; see C. Houtman, 'The Pentateuch', in A.S. van der Woude (ed.), *The World of the Old Testament: Bible Handbook, Volume II* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 199.

⁶For a recent defence of this dating based on linguistic considerations, see A. Hurvitz, 'The Historical Quest for "Ancient Israel" and the Linguistic Evidence of the Hebrew Bible: Some Methodological Observations', *VT* 47 (1997) 301-15. An exilic or early post-exilic date for the final redaction of the books of Genesis to Kings does not necessarily indicate that the ideas reflected in the text are late. On the contrary, the text itself claims to be reporting events that took place over a long period of time. It is not, however, the purpose of this paper to assess the authenticity of these traditions.

were composed. Given present uncertainties regarding the validity of the Documentary Hypothesis,⁷ and continuing debate about the redactional stages involved in the composition of the Deuteronomistic History,⁸ the whole issue of the growth of the books of Genesis to Kings is presently in a state of turmoil. We shall probably witness in the coming years a renewed discussion of the process by which all these books were compiled.⁹ Since such investigations are primarily intended to clarify the historical development of ancient Israel's traditions, they are of secondary importance to the subject of this article. Our present concern is not to explore the authenticity of the traditions recorded in Genesis to Kings; rather it is to examine how these traditions are used within the final redaction of these books.

Unfortunately, Old Testament scholars tend not to read and comment on the books of Genesis to Kings as a unified narrative; attention is usually given to either the Pentateuch or the Deuteronomistic History. Those who do comment on Genesis to Kings as a whole are inclined to describe it as a record of the history of the people of Israel. This is implied by R.N. Whybray who remarks that the Pentateuch is 'a history of the origins of the people of Israel, prefaced by an account of the origins of the world', which may have been intended as a 'supplement (*i.e.* a prologue) to the work of the

⁷Cf. J. Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1975); R. Rendtorff, *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* (BZAW 17; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1977); R.N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study* (JSOTSS 53; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987). For a summary of the contributions made by these scholars to current Pentateuchal studies, see T.D. Alexander, *Abraham in the Negev: A Source-critical Investigation of Genesis 20:1-22:19* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997) 20-27.

⁸Cf. J.G. McConville, *Grace in the End: A Study of Deuteronomistic Theology* (SOTBT; Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Zondervan/Paternoster, 1993); *idem*, 'The Old Testament Historical Books in Modern Scholarship', *Themelios* 22 (1997) 3-13.

⁹Cf. C. Westermann, *Die Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments: Gab es ein deuteronomistisches Geschichtswerk?* (Theologische Bücherei 87 AT; Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1994); E.T. Mullen, *Ethnic Myths and Pentateuchal Foundations: A New Approach to the Formation of the Pentateuch* (JBLSS; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

Deuteronomistic Historian, which dealt with the more recent period of the national history.’¹⁰ According to C. Houtman, Genesis to Kings ‘presents itself as a description of Israel’s history from the perspective of its calling and its continual unfaithfulness.’¹¹ E.T. Mullen has recently proposed that the Tetrateuch was composed as a prologue to the Deuteronomistic History in order to provide ‘a narrative foundation for the reformulation and maintenance of ‘Israelite’ ethnic and national identity in the Second Temple period.’¹²

III. Nationhood

At first sight the idea that the books of Genesis to Kings were brought together to provide an account of Israel’s history seems to be the obvious explanation for their redactional unity. Beginning in Genesis we trace the growth of Israel from the initial call of Abraham through to the establishment of his descendants as a nation in the land of Canaan. Years of struggle and frustration eventually give way to a time of stability and splendour during the reigns of David and Solomon. Thereafter, the nation’s history is marked by decline, leading eventually to the overthrow of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians respectively.

Central to the development of the theme of nationhood in Genesis to Kings are the divine promises announced to Abra(ha)m in Genesis 12:1-3. These play a major role in linking together the books of Genesis to Kings by setting the agenda for most of what follows.¹³ Summoning Abra(ha)m to leave his family and homeland, the Lord promises, ‘I will make you into a great nation’ (Gn. 12:2). Several chapters later this promise of nationhood is developed more fully and confirmed by a covenant which focuses on two areas: numerous descendants (Gn. 15:1-6) and land (Gn. 15:7-21). The fulfilment of

¹⁰*The Making of the Pentateuch*, 242.

¹¹‘The Pentateuch’, 200.

¹²*Ethnic Myths and Pentateuchal Foundations*, 327.

¹³*Cf. e.g., J. Bright, Covenant and Promise* (London: SCM, 1977) 24; G.J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco: Word, 1987) 283; C.H.H. Scobie, ‘Israel and the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology’, *TynB* 43 (1992) 285-86.

the divine covenant of Genesis 15 plays an important role in the development of the narrative in the Pentateuch and Former Prophets.

The divine promise of land is renewed with Abraham's descendants, Isaac and Jacob (Gn. 26:3; 28:13; 35:12; *cf.* 28:4; 48:4; 50:24). In Exodus God's promise of land to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is mentioned on various occasions (2:24; 6:4, 5; 13:11; 32:13; 33:1; *cf.* Lv. 26:42; Dt. 34:4), and there are several allusions to the covenant of Genesis 15 (Ex. 3:8, 17; 13:5; 23:23; 33:2; in these passages the peoples of Gn. 15:19-21 are named; *cf.* Dt. 1:7; 7:1; 20:17). Given specific references to slavery and release in Genesis 15:13-14, it is hardly surprising that this covenant features prominently in Exodus. Indeed, God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt is directly linked in Exodus 2:24 to his covenant with Abraham. Later, after the Israelites are punished for making the golden calf, the renewal of the Sinai covenant is once again based on the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob concerning land (*cf.* Ex. 32:13). Preparations for taking possession of the land are prominent in the book of Numbers. Occupation is delayed, however, through the unbelief and rebellion of the people. Nevertheless, after the death of all the adult Israelites who left Egypt, apart from Joshua and Caleb, the imminent fulfilment of the promise of land is anticipated in the later chapters of Numbers and in the book of Deuteronomy. The books of Joshua, Judges and Samuel, up to the reigns of David and Solomon, record the gradual completion of this process.¹⁴

The promise of land and its fulfilment clearly plays an important role in the books of Genesis to Samuel. The same is true as regards the promise of descendants, the other aspect of becoming a great nation. A recurring theme in the patriarchal narratives is God's intervention in overcoming the barrenness of the matriarchs, Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel (Gn. 21:1; 25:21; 30:22-24). In the opening chapter of Exodus the remarkable increase of the Israelites causes resentment in Egypt and leads to the repressive policy of the Pharaoh (Ex. 1:6-10). Later, as the Israelites prepare to enter the land of

¹⁴On the fulfilment of the promise of land, see T.E. McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 42-55.

Canaan, Moses acknowledges that the promise of Genesis 15:5 has been fulfilled: ‘The LORD your God has increased your numbers so that today you are as many as the stars of the sky’ (Dt. 1:10; *cf.* Dt. 10:22; 28:62; Ne. 9:23). While the topic of population growth is less prominent in the books of Joshua to Kings, it is specifically noted that during the reign of Solomon ‘the people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore’ (1 Ki. 4:20; *cf.* 2 Sa. 17:11).¹⁵

Whereas the books of Genesis to 2 Samuel describe the gradual fulfilment of the divine promise of nationhood to Abraham, the books of 1 and 2 Kings chart the reversal of this process. Beginning with Solomon the narrative describes how the failure of both monarchy and people leads to the loss of territory and the deportation of many citizens. Of significance is the fact that these later events are anticipated even before the Israelites enter the promised land (*cf.* Dt. 28:64-68; 30:1,4). However, there are indications that the loss of land and population is not the final chapter in God’s dealings with Israel (*cf.* Dt. 30:1-5; 1 Ki. 8:46-51).

This brief survey reveals that the theme of nationhood plays a major role in linking together the books of Genesis to Kings. While in no way wishing to diminish the importance of this theme, we should observe that it is paralleled by another concept which is as important, if not more so, for understanding the redactional unity of the books of Genesis to Kings. This parallel theme concerns a king through whom the nations of the earth will be blessed.

IV. Royal Deliverer

While scholars have long recognised the importance of the promise of nationhood in Genesis, they have failed, by and large, to observe that Genesis also focuses on a divinely-promised royal ‘seed’. This failure results, in part at least, from a general tendency to neglect the final

¹⁵It is perhaps worth noting that 1 Ki. 4:20 is immediately followed by the comment that ‘Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt’.

form of Genesis in favour of source- and form-critical approaches. When, however, Genesis is viewed as a literary unity, there can be little doubt that it is especially interested in pointing towards the coming of a unique king. Viewed against this background, the theme of kingship in the books of Exodus to Kings takes on a new dimension.

Although the promise of nationhood (*i.e.*, land and descendants) is a central feature of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis, it is not the only promise highlighted. The Lord instructs Abraham:

Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you, so that I may make you into a great nation and bless you and make your name great. Be a blessing, so that I may bless those who bless you, and curse the one who disdains you, and so that all the families of the ground may be blessed through you (Gn. 12:1-3; my translation).¹⁶

This statement falls naturally into two halves, each introduced by an imperative. Whereas the first part focuses primarily on the promise of nationhood, the second centres chiefly on the blessing of others.¹⁷ The entire speech comes to a climax in the statement: 'so that all the

¹⁶Two aspects of the translation adopted here require clarification. First, the imperative form *wehyeh* ('be') in 12:2d is maintained. This is also the conclusion reached by L.A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (JSOTSS 96; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990) 53-55, who reviews briefly other possibilities. Second, special consideration has been given to the fact that the imperatives 'go' and 'be a blessing' are both followed by cohortatives. In such contexts the cohortative normally expresses purpose or result (*cf.* E. Kautzsch [ed.], *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1910] 320; S.R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew* [10th ed.; London: Methuen, 1916] 64; P. Joüon, *Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique* [2nd ed.; Rome: Institut Biblique Pontifical, 1947] 314-15; T.O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973] 119). To highlight this syntactic arrangement, the imperatives 'go' and 'be a blessing' are followed by 'so that'.

¹⁷Although God states that he will 'curse the one who disdains you', the emphasis rests upon blessing. This is underlined by the distinction that is drawn between 'those who bless you' and 'the one who disdains you'; it is surely implied here that whereas many will be blessed, only a few will be cursed. The priority of blessing over cursing is also underlined by the five-fold repetition of the verb 'to bless' in verses 2-3.

families of the ground may be blessed through you.’¹⁸ The promise that Abraham will become a ‘great nation’ is probably best understood as part of God’s plan to bless all the families of the ground. The primary motive behind the call of Abraham is God’s intention to bless, rather than curse, humanity.¹⁹ By commanding him to leave his homeland and be a blessing, God places the onus on Abraham to obey in order that the promises concerning nationhood and blessing may be fulfilled.

As we have already observed the fulfilment of the promise of nationhood is later guaranteed through the divine covenant made with Abraham in Genesis 15. A further covenant is introduced in Genesis 17.²⁰ Most commentators, unfortunately, tend to focus on the sign of the covenant, circumcision, without noting that the essence of this covenant lies in the promise that Abraham will be the ‘father of many nations’ (17:4-5). Since this promise is later associated with Sarah—

¹⁸Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 278, comments, ‘this clause brings the passage to a triumphant and universal conclusion’. There has been considerable debate regarding the correct translation of the verb. Three possibilities exist: it may be translated as (a) a passive (‘they will be blessed’); (b) a middle (‘they will find blessing’); or (c) a reflexive (‘they will bless themselves’). Since the earliest versions (LXX, Targum Onkelos, Vg; cf. Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8) reflect the passive sense, that is the translation adopted here (cf. O.T. Allis, ‘The Blessing of Abraham’, *PTR* 25 [1927] 263-98; V.P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990] 374-76).

¹⁹On the importance of the promise of blessing, see V.P. Hamilton, ‘Genesis: Theology of’, in W.A. VanGemeren (ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) Vol. 4, 667.

²⁰While the covenant of ch. 15 focuses primarily on nationhood (land and descendants), the covenant in ch. 17 highlights Abraham’s special status as regards the nations. Unfortunately, biblical scholars have tended to blur the differences between these two covenants, some viewing them as parallel accounts of the same covenant, preserved in different sources. For a fuller discussion of the Abraham narrative, see T.D. Alexander, ‘Abraham Re-assessed Theologically: The Abraham Narrative and the New Testament Understanding of Justification by Faith’, in R.S. Hess, P.E. Satterthwaite, G.J. Wenham (eds.), *He Swore an Oath* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Baker/Paternoster, 1994) 7-28.

‘she will be the mother of nations’ (17:16)—it is unlikely that it includes the nations descended from Abraham through his relationships with Hagar (*cf.* 17:20) and Keturah (25:1-4). The Old Testament, however, is remarkably silent concerning the idea that Abraham would be the biological ancestor of different nations. In the light of this, we should observe that the word ‘father’ is sometimes ‘used of a variety of social roles that carried authority or exercised a protective or caring function. It could be used of a prophet (2 Kgs 6:21), priest (Judg 18:19), king (1 Sam 24:11), or governor (Isa 22:20-21).’²¹ By taking the word in this non-biological sense, we may understand Genesis 17:4-5 as stating that Abraham will be the ‘father of many nations’ not because these nations are his physical descendants but because he will be for them a channel of divine blessing.²² As N.M. Sarna observes, the phrase ‘father of many nations’ ‘has a more universal application in that a large segment of humanity looks upon Abraham as its spiritual father.’²³ In support of a non-biological understanding of ‘father’, it is noteworthy that Abraham is instructed to circumcise those who are not his offspring; this includes those born in his ‘household or bought with money from a foreigner’ (Gn. 17:12-13). This suggests that circumcision, and the covenant associated with it, was never intended to be a sign of racial purity.²⁴

Although all the male members of Abraham’s household are circumcised, including Ishmael, the Lord emphasises that the covenant will be established with Isaac, and him alone; Ishmael is specifically excluded in spite of being circumcised.²⁵ This introduces an important

²¹C.J.H. Wright, ‘אב’, in *NIDOTTE*, Vol. 1, 221.

²²This understanding of ‘father’ is probably reflected in the unusual comment that Joseph ‘was father to Pharaoh’ (45:8). Furthermore, when God blesses Jacob in 35:11, echoing an earlier blessing by Isaac upon Jacob (28:3), a distinction is drawn between ‘a nation’ and ‘a community of nations’ coming from him. The implication would seem to be that whereas many nations will be closely associated with him, only one nation will be directly descended from him.

²³N.M. Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) 124.

²⁴Later in Genesis the men of Shechem undergo circumcision in order to establish a bond of kinship with Abraham’s descendants (Gn. 34:14-17). In view of this, their subsequent slaughter by Simeon and Levi is all the more reprehensible.

²⁵*Cf.* Gn. 21:12. A similar pattern may be observed concerning Esau and Jacob. The covenant is established with Jacob, but not Esau. The importance of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as successive recipients of the divine promises is reflected in the way they are mentioned together in later passages.

distinction between those who may enjoy the benefits of this covenant and those through whom the covenant will be established. Whereas the former includes all who are circumcised, the latter appears to be restricted to a single line of descendants. On this I shall have more to say below.

The Abraham narrative moves towards an important climax in Genesis 22. After testing Abraham's obedience by demanding that he sacrifice his much loved son Isaac, the episode concludes with a divine oath (Gn. 22:16-18). This speech corresponds closely with the initial divine speech in Genesis 12:1-3, and taken together they frame the main section of the Abraham narrative.²⁶ This oath possibly also marks the ratification of the covenant announced in Genesis 17.²⁷ As it stands the Lord's proclamation to Abraham falls into two distinctive parts; whereas the first half affirms that Abraham's 'seed' will become very numerous, the second half asserts that Abraham's 'seed' will defeat his enemies and mediate blessing to the nations of the earth. While each half of the oath refers to 'seed', syntactical considerations

²⁶Three factors suggest that Gn. 22:20-29:11 forms an appendix to the main Abraham narrative. First, genealogies are frequently used in Genesis to separate narrative sections. Although 22:20-24 is short and does not follow the pattern of the main genealogies in Genesis, its contents are clearly genealogical in nature. Second, the divine speeches in 12:1-3 and 22:15-18 form an *inclusio*, framing chs. 12 to 22. While the speeches differ in their terminology, they are remarkably similar in substance, and the divine oath in 22:15-18 forms a very fitting conclusion to the process started by the call of Abraham in 12:1-3 (*cf.* R.W.L. Moberly, 'The Earliest Commentary on the Akedah', *VT* 38 (1988) 322-23 = *idem*, *From Eden to Golgotha: Essays in Biblical Theology* (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) 73. Third, A. Abela, *The Themes of the Abraham Narrative: Thematic Coherence within the Abraham Literary Unit of Genesis 11,27-25,18* (Malta: Studia Editions, 1989) 9, suggests that the material in 22:20-25:18 is a self-contained unit, forming a palistrophic pattern.

²⁷*Cf.* T.D. Alexander, 'Genesis 22 and the Covenant of Circumcision', *JSOT* 25 (1983) 17-22.

strongly suggest that in the second half, in contrast to the first, the term ‘seed’ denotes a single descendant of Abraham.²⁸ In other words, God swears that the nations will be blessed through one of Abraham’s descendants rather than through all of them collectively. Moreover, this individual descendant will be victorious over his enemies.

This emphasis upon a single descendant takes on special significance when viewed against the whole of Genesis. As I have discussed elsewhere, several distinctive literary features reveal that the book of Genesis traces the development of a unique line of ‘seed’ beginning with Adam and ending with Jacob/Israel and his twelve sons.²⁹ One of these features is the *tôledôt* formulae (‘These are the generations of...’)³⁰ which, in part, function like the lens on a zoom-camera by focusing attention on a single individual and his immediate descendants. Used in conjunction with the linear genealogies found in Genesis 5 and 11, the *tôledôt* formulae enable the Genesis narrative to follow the progress of a unique family line which includes figures such as Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Linked to the *tôledôt* formulae in terms of purpose is the word ‘seed’ which is used in Genesis as a *Leitwort*; it occurs throughout Genesis 59 times compared with 170 times in the rest of the Old Testament. Genesis draws attention to the existence of a distinctive line of ‘seed’ which begins with Seth, the third born son to Adam and Eve (*cf.* Gn. 4:25), and concludes with Perez, the son born as a result of Judah’s unusual relationship with Tamar (Gn. 38:27-29).³¹ Throughout Genesis, and especially in the patriarchal

²⁸*Cf.* T.D. Alexander, ‘Further Observations on the Term “Seed” in Genesis’, *TynB* 48 (1997) 363-67; this builds on J. Collins, ‘A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?’, *TynB* 48 (1997) 139-48.

²⁹*Cf.* T.D. Alexander, ‘From Adam to Judah: the Significance of the Family Tree in Genesis’, *EQ* 61 (1989) 5-19; *idem.*, ‘Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis’, *TynB* 44 (1993) 255-70.

³⁰Gn. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2.

³¹The significance of Perez as the one through whom the line of ‘seed’ will be continued is marked by several features. By interrupting the account of Joseph’s life, priority is given to the birth of Perez and his twin brother Zerah. Moreover, the special attention given to the motif of ‘seed’ in 38:8-9, and the subsequent account of Tamar’s extraordinary actions in order to secure the continuation of the line of ‘seed’, suggests that the birth of Perez is significant. This is possibly also indicated by the manner in which Perez ‘breaks out’ of his mother’s womb prior to his twin brother Zerah.

narratives, special care is taken to establish the identity of the one through whom this line of seed is traced; occasionally this results in the first-born son being passed over in favour of a younger sibling.³²

When due attention is given to the *tôledôt* formulae and the keyword ‘seed’, it becomes evident that the book of Genesis in its final form anticipates the coming of a king through whom God’s blessing will be mediated to all the nations of the earth. The coming of such an individual is first intimated in Genesis 3:14-15 when the Lord God says to the serpent:

Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring [seed] and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel (NIV).

Although modern trends in Old Testament scholarship have led many writers to reject the idea that the ‘seed of the woman’ refers to an individual, the case for such an interpretation remains strong,³³ especially if one takes into account J. Collin’s recent observations on the syntax of Genesis 3:15.³⁴

³²Seth takes priority over Cain (Gn. 5:3), Isaac over Ishmael (Gn. 21:12); Jacob over Esau (Gn. 27:36).

³³*Cf.* T.D. Alexander, ‘Messianic Ideology in the Book of Genesis’, in P.E. Satterthwaite, R.S. Hess and G.J. Wenham (eds.), *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Baker/Paternoster, 1995) 27-32.

³⁴Collins, ‘A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15)’. While Genesis 3:15 does not explicitly state that this individual will be of royal status, W. Wifall notes links with various ‘royal’ Psalms, and these he takes as indicating a Davidic or royal background to Genesis 3:15. According to Wifall, ‘David is addressed as God’s “anointed” or “messiah” (Ps 89:21, 39; 2 Sam 22:51) whose “seed” will endure forever under God’s favor (Ps 89:5, 30, 37). As Yahweh has crushed the ancient serpent “Rahab” (Ps 89:11), so now David and his sons will crush their enemies in the dust beneath their feet (Ps 89:24; 2 Sam 22:37-43)... In Ps 72:9, the foes of the Davidic king are described as “bowing down before him” and “licking the dust.” In the familiar “messianic” Psalms, God is described as having placed “all things under his feet” (Ps 8:6) and will make “your enemies your footstool” (Ps 110:1)’ (‘Gen 3:15—A Protevangelium?’, *CBQ* 36 [1974] 363).

The linear genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 trace the ‘seed of the woman’ to Abraham, through whom God promises to bless all the families of the ground (Gn. 12:1-3). This same promise probably underlies the covenant of circumcision and the idea that Abraham will be the ‘father of many nations’. Although this covenant is made first with Abraham, it is clearly orientated towards the future. The Lord states that it will be established with Abraham’s ‘seed’ ‘for the generations to come’ (Gn. 17:7), and the establishment of the covenant is linked specifically to Isaac. As we have already observed, the Lord later swears to Abraham, presumably in Isaac’s presence, that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through his ‘seed’ (Gn. 22:18). The fulfilment of this divine oath, which is unique within the Pentateuch, also lies in the future.

The Abraham narrative builds on the divine promise given in Genesis 3:15 regarding the ‘seed of the woman’ overcoming the ‘seed of the serpent’. The motif of blessing which is very prominent in Genesis 12:1-3 stands in marked contrast to that of cursing which dominates the divine judgements announced in Genesis 3. In addition, within the Abraham narrative there are indications that the line of seed will give rise to royal descendants. At the outset this is reflected in the promise that Abraham’s name will ‘become great’,³⁵ and, although he is nowhere designated a king, Abraham is presented in various episodes as enjoying a status similar to that of contemporary monarchs (Gn. 14:1-24; 21:22-34; 23:6). Furthermore, it is significant that the Lord promises Abraham that ‘kings will come from you’ (Gn. 17:6; *cf.* 17:16).

The theme of royalty is less evident in Genesis 25-36. Isaac, like his father Abraham, enters into a covenant with Abimelech, king of Gerar (Gn. 26:26-31). Upon his return from Paddan Aram, Jacob receives the divine promise that ‘kings will come from your body’ (Gn. 35:11). The existence of a future monarchy in Israel is also

³⁵*Cf.* Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 275-76; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 372-73.

suggested by the brief comment in Genesis 36:31, 'These were the kings who reigned in Edom before any Israelite king reigned.'

In marked contrast, kingship is important in the account of Joseph's life, being the dominant motif in the two dreams which he experiences (Gn. 37:5-11). Although his brothers, filled with jealousy and hatred, remark, 'Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?' Joseph's father 'kept the matter in mind'. In spite of the brothers' attempt to rid themselves of this arrogant upstart, Joseph later emerges from an Egyptian prison to become second only to Pharaoh in authority over the kingdom of Egypt (Gn. 41:39-43). Ironically, when years later Joseph's older brothers travel to Egypt, the narrative describes how they bow before him with their faces to the ground (Gn. 42:6). In due course, however, Joseph reveals his identity to them, and remarks how God has made him 'father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt' (Gn. 45:8; *cf.* 45:9, 26).³⁶

Although the account of Joseph's life dominates Genesis 37-50, when in old age Jacob gathers his sons around him to tell them what will happen in days to come (*cf.* Gn. 49:1), it is noteworthy that kingship is associated with the descendants of Judah (*cf.* Gn. 49:8-12), and not Joseph (*cf.* Gn. 49:22-26). While the poetic language of Genesis 49 makes it possible for differing interpretations to be placed upon Jacob's remarks, viewed against the book of Genesis as a whole, these verses clearly point to a powerful future ruler before whom the nations will submit in obedience.³⁷ In the light of this the earlier description of the birth of Judah's son, Perez, takes on added significance for this is clearly the continuation of the line of 'seed' through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed.³⁸

The account of the Israelites' divine deliverance from bondage in Egypt and their journey towards the promised land

³⁶Joseph's description of his position in Egypt appears to be overly stated.

³⁷*Cf.* Alexander, 'Messianic Ideology in the Book of Genesis', 32-37. In passing, we should also observe that the reign of this destined king will be marked by a time of abundant fruitfulness, a sign of divine blessing.

³⁸The continuation of the line of 'seed' is a dominant theme in Genesis 38.

dominates the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy. These books advance the theme of the promised king by describing the creation of a holy nation which will play an important role in bringing to fulfilment God's eternal covenant with Abraham. While the theme of kingship surfaces only rarely in these books (*e.g.*, Nu. 24:17-19; Dt. 17:14-20), it becomes much more prominent in Joshua and Judges. The latter books anticipate the establishment of a monarchy in Israel by focusing on the divine provision of spirit-empowered deliverers who rescue the repentant Israelites from their enemies, thus enabling them to live in peace within the promised land. Although those appointed by God as leaders fulfil many of the tasks of a king, they are prohibited from creating royal dynasties, as highlighted in the story of Gideon's son, Abimelech (Judg. 9:1-57). The picture in Judges of ever increasing moral and spiritual decline comes to a climax in the final four chapters of the book. Significantly, these are framed by the refrain, 'in those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit' (Judg. 17:6; 21:25; *cf.* 18:1; 19:1).

The book of Samuel describes the appointment of Saul as the first king of Israel. However, due to his own shortcomings he is soon replaced by David, the youngest son of Jesse, a descendant of Judah.³⁹ When David is eventually enthroned as king over all Israel, he establishes Jerusalem as his capital, and brings there the ark of the covenant. This event symbolises David's commitment to serving the Lord. The Lord then makes a covenant with David in which he promises to establish David's dynasty for ever (2 Sa. 7). While David succeeds in delivering the Israelites from their enemies, his reign is marred by his failure on various occasions to obey God.⁴⁰ The reign of David's son Solomon provides an interesting picture of the kind of rule which God intends to establish through the promised 'seed' of

³⁹The significance of David's ancestry for the fulfilment of the divine promises announced in Genesis is highlighted in the book of Ruth; *cf.* E.H. Merrill, 'The Book of Ruth: Narration and Shared Themes', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (1985) 130-39.

⁴⁰*Cf.* P.E. Satterthwaite, 'David in the Books of Samuel: A Messianic Hope?', in *The Lord's Anointed*, 41-65.

Abraham. Unfortunately, Solomon fails to remain loyal to the Lord and the kingdom is partitioned following his death, with the house of David keeping control over only the region of Judah. Throughout the book of Kings God's promise to establish David's dynasty for ever stands in tension with his warning that he will punish the disobedience of David's descendants. Eventually, Kings records the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the removal of king Jehoiachin to Babylon. While this marks the end of the Davidic dynasty's rule over Jerusalem, the final episode in the book of Kings focuses on the release of Jehoiachin from prison, an event that possibly anticipates better times to come.⁴¹

The preceding survey reveals, if somewhat sketchily, that the books of Genesis to 2 Kings focus considerable attention upon the divine promise of a royal deliverer.⁴² The process by which this promise will be fulfilled unfolds so gradually throughout Genesis to Kings that it is easy to overlook it. Yet, our reading of Genesis, and the Abraham narrative in particular, suggests that the promise of a future king through whom the nations will be blessed is more important than the promise of nationhood.⁴³ However, in spite of this, the divine pledge of a royal saviour remains unfulfilled by the end of Kings. Nevertheless, some progress towards fulfilment occurs as the line of 'seed' introduced in Genesis is traced through to the creation of the Davidic dynasty (Gn. 38:1-30; Ru. 4:18-22). Furthermore, following the establishment of David as king over Israel, God makes a covenant with him confirming that through his royal line the nations of the earth will be blessed (2 Sa. 7:5-16; 1 Ch. 17:4-14).⁴⁴ As the

⁴¹Cf. I.W. Provan, 'The Messiah in the Book of Kings', in *The Lord's Anointed*, 67-85.

⁴²Further evidence is provided in T.D. Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible's Portrait of the Messiah* (Leicester: IVP, 1998) 15-96.

⁴³Although the promises of nationhood and royal saviour are distinctive, it would be a mistake to divorce them from each other for the latter can only be fulfilled through the existence of the former.

⁴⁴For a fuller discussion of the Davidic covenant and in particular the expression 'and this is the law of mankind' (2 Sa. 7:19), see McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise*, 21-35. O.P. Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980) 33-34, notes that the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem is linked by David to the covenant promised to Abraham (1 Ch. 16:15-18). Further links between David and Abraham are discussed by R.E. Clements, *Abraham and David* (London: SCM, 1967).

books of 1 and 2 Kings reveal, however, the cumulative disobedience of David's descendants appears to thwart the fulfilment of God's promise to bless the nations. There are, nevertheless, strong indications in Kings that the removal of the house of David from the throne in Jerusalem is not the end of the story. Although God punishes with complete justification the sins of David's descendants, the hope remains that there will yet be a 'son of David' through whom the nations will experience God's favour.

Before drawing this survey to a close, several brief comments should be added. Since the books of Genesis to Kings, as a coherent narrative, cannot have existed prior to the exilic period, the disastrous events of the exile may well have been catalytic in bringing together into a continuous account all of the material presently found in these books. This does not mean, however, that the tradition of a divinely-promised royal saviour originated after 587 B.C. Arguably, the eighth century prophets were already familiar with this idea; we see it reflected, for example, in the final chapter of Amos and in Isaiah 7-11.⁴⁵ There are also grounds for believing that much of the material contained in Genesis to Kings existed long before the exile occurred; unfortunately, scholarly opinion is currently divided concerning the nature and date of the sources used to compose the books of Genesis to Kings. From a different perspective, it is worth observing that it would require an author of exceptional genius and religious optimism to compose these books *ab initio* after the demise of the Davidic monarchy and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

⁴⁵There is no need to document in detail here the importance of the Davidic dynasty within the religious thinking of ancient Israel. We see this not only in the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament, but also, for example, in the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.

V. Implications for the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments

Having focused on the books of Genesis to Kings as a unified narrative, let us return briefly to the issue of the relationship of the two testaments.

A. Promise-fulfilment

Our survey of Genesis to Kings supports the idea, noted by Baker, that the two testaments are linked on the basis of promise-fulfilment. The whole movement within the Genesis-Kings narrative is from promise towards fulfilment. Remarkably, however, the promise of a descendant from the 'seed' of Abraham through whom the nations will be blessed remains unrealised, with only a partial fulfilment occurring during the reigns of David and Solomon.⁴⁶ In marked contrast, the New Testament documents affirm positively that God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the 'seed' of Abraham (*e.g.*, Acts 3:25-26; Gal. 3:13-16) and 'son of David' (*e.g.*, Mt. 1:1).

While agreeing with Baker that promise-fulfilment is an important factor in defining the relationship between the two testaments, my observations highlight an important way in which his approach should be modified. In common with many others, he discerns on the basis of Genesis 12:1-3, three main elements to the promises in Genesis: land, descendants ('a great nation'), and a relationship with God ('blessing').⁴⁷ Although these three elements reflect different aspects of the divine promises in Genesis, Baker fails to identify with sufficient clarity the main promise which centres on a future individual through whom the serpent will be defeated (Gn. 3:15) and all the nations of the earth blessed (Gn. 22:18; *cf.* 12:3). This is *the*

⁴⁶This partial fulfilment foreshadows the full realisation that has yet to take place.

⁴⁷Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible*, 215-18; *cf. e.g.*, D.J.A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (JSOTSS 10; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978) 29-43; L.A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (JSOTSS 96; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990) 51-114; J. McKeown, *A Study of the Main Unifying Themes in the Hebrew Text of the Book of Genesis* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, The Queen's University of Belfast, 1991).

divine promise which lies at the heart of Genesis to Kings.⁴⁸ Moreover, of all the promises, it provides the strongest link between the two testaments.

B. Christology

A further way advocated by Baker as important for explaining the relationship of the testaments is Christology. While the Genesis-Kings narrative does not directly ascribe to the divinely-promised royal saviour the title of messiah, there can be little doubt that the New Testament concept of messiah is rooted in the traditions reflected in this material. While twentieth century Old Testament scholarship has generally reacted strongly against finding messianic ideology within the books of Genesis to Kings, we have observed the viability of doing otherwise. By giving due attention to the existence of a unique line of 'seed' in Genesis, it becomes apparent that the entire Genesis-Kings narrative is especially interested in the coming of a divinely-promised king. As we look for the fulfilment of this divine promise in the books of Genesis to Kings, the judges and kings of Israel and Judah pre-figure in a rich variety of ways the one who has yet to come.⁴⁹ Compared with alternative approaches, this provides a much more satisfactory basis upon which to build a Christological reading of the Old Testament.

VI. Conclusion

In this article it is not possible to do justice to all of the material in Genesis to Kings that relates to the divine promise of a future royal deliverer through whom the nations of the earth will be blessed. Hopefully, however, sufficient has been said to demonstrate that the presence of 'royal expectations' in the books of Genesis to Kings may be of substantial help to Biblical Theologians in defining the

⁴⁸Although the promise may be traced back to Gn. 3:15, later passages expand upon it, fleshing out in more detail how the promise will be fulfilled.

⁴⁹See Alexander, *The Servant King*, 41-96.

relationship between the two testaments. This is especially so given its importance for the concept of promise-fulfilment. Furthermore, by noting the centrality of 'royal expectations' in Genesis to Kings, we are in a much better position to understand how the Old Testament functions as a witness to Christ.⁵⁰

⁵⁰I am grateful to James McKeown and Paul Williamson for offering constructive comments on an earlier draft of this article, which was originally delivered as the 1998 Tyndale Biblical Theology Lecture.