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## PROMISE, FULFILLMENT, AND ISRAEL: TESTING A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF CHRIST AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the theological tension within biblical theology concerning the relationship between New Testament Christology, the concept of the Kingdom of God, and the theological significance of Israel. Contemporary debates frequently oscillate between supersessionist readings that marginalize Israel and continuity models that emphasize the enduring validity of the covenant. This study seeks to evaluate how New Testament texts construct the relationship between Jesus' messianic identity, the fulfillment of covenantal promises, and the extension of the Kingdom of God to the nations. Employing a canonical exegetical approach integrated with historical-narrative analysis of key New Testament texts, the study traces patterns of continuity and transformation within the motif of promise and fulfillment. The analysis indicates that New Testament Christology does not sever its relationship with Israel; rather, it rearticulates covenantal hope within an eschatological and inclusive framework of the Kingdom. These findings challenge the rigid dichotomy between replacement and continuity and propose an integrative model in which the Kingdom of God is understood as an expansion of Israel's promise without erasing its theological identity. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of a biblical-theological paradigm that integrates canonical reading with constructive theological reflection. Its theological implications lie in the reformulation of the relationship between the Church and Israel within the framework of salvation history, avoiding both supersessionist reductionism and ethnic particularism.

**Keywords:** Testament Christology; Kingdom Theology; Israel and Covenant; Promise-Fulfillment Motif; Canonical Biblical Theology

### **Abstrak**

*Artikel ini mengkaji ketegangan teologis dalam diskursus teologi biblika mengenai relasi antara Kristologi Perjanjian Baru, konsep Kerajaan Allah, dan makna teologis Israel. Perdebatan modern sering bergerak antara pembacaan supersesionalis yang meniadakan peran Israel dan model kontinuitas yang menekankan keberlanjutan perjanjian. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengevaluasi bagaimana teks-teks Perjanjian Baru mengonstruksi hubungan antara identitas mesianik Yesus, penggenapan janji perjanjian, dan perluasan Kerajaan Allah kepada bangsa-bangsa. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan eksegesis kanonik yang dipadukan dengan analisis historis-naratif terhadap teks-teks kunci*

*Perjanjian Baru, studi ini menelusuri pola kontinuitas dan transformasi dalam motif janji dan penggenapan. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa Kristologi Perjanjian Baru tidak memutus relasi dengan Israel, melainkan mereartikulasikan harapan perjanjian dalam kerangka kerajaan yang bersifat eskatologis dan inklusif. Temuan ini menantang dikotomi tajam antara penggantian dan keberlanjutan, serta menawarkan model integratif yang membaca Kerajaan Allah sebagai perluasan janji Israel tanpa menghapus identitas teologisnya. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan paradigma teologi biblika yang memadukan pembacaan kanonik dengan refleksi teologi konstruktif. Implikasi teologisnya terletak pada perumusan kembali relasi gereja dan Israel dalam kerangka sejarah keselamatan tanpa jatuh pada reduksionisme supersesionalis maupun partikularisme etnis.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Kristologi Perjanjian Baru; Teologi Kerajaan; Israel dan Perjanjian; Motif Janji-Penggenapan; Teologi Biblika Kanonik*

## INTRODUCTION

In the history of Christian theology, Christology and the concept of the Kingdom of God have often been treated as relatively independent fields of inquiry. Christology typically focuses on the identity and work of Jesus, whereas the Kingdom of God is discussed as an eschatological theme concerning divine rule. This separation generates a hermeneutical problem, since the New Testament presents both realities as deeply interconnected. The central question, therefore, concerns how the relationship between Jesus' messianic identity, the proclamation of the Kingdom, and Israel's covenantal hope should be understood within a coherent biblical-theological framework.

The historical background of Jesus' proclamation is rooted in

Israel's covenantal tradition, particularly the Davidic promise (2Sam. 7:12-16), which shaped Israel's messianic expectations. Jesus' announcement of the nearness of the Kingdom of God (Mark. 1:15) addresses a community living within this horizon of hope. New Testament Christology, therefore, cannot be detached from Israel's theological context and the narrative of covenantal promise that underlies it. The issue is not merely whether Jesus fulfills the promise, but how such fulfillment is represented in the text as both continuity and transformation (Selman 1979).

Contemporary scholarship reflects diverse approaches to this issue. Richard Bauckham situates Jesus within the framework of Jewish monotheism and emphasizes his participation in the divine identity

(Bauckham 2008, 27-9). George Eldon Ladd interprets the Kingdom of God as already present in Jesus' ministry yet not fully consummated (Ladd 1996, 218–21). Meanwhile, Paul's argument in Romans 9-11 demonstrates that God's promises to Israel remain integral to the broader narrative of salvation that includes the nations. These perspectives open space for a synthesis that has not been fully explored within biblical theology (Longenecker 1989, 81–99).

The scholarly contribution of this article lies in integrating Christology, the Kingdom of God, and Israel within a mutually illuminating analytical framework. The article argues that the New Testament reconstructs Israel's covenantal hope through the figure of Jesus as the Davidic Messiah while simultaneously universalizing the scope of the Kingdom. This approach proposes a biblical-theological model that reads promise and fulfillment as a narrative process that preserves Israel's theological significance while opening an eschatological horizon for all nations.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a textual-interpretive approach within biblical theology by integrating canonical exegesis with constructive theological reflection. The term "qualitative" in this context does not refer to empirical methodology but to conceptual analysis of biblical texts as the primary source of theological argumentation. The methodological focus lies in a critical reading of narrative structure, theological themes, and the development of the promise-fulfillment motif across the Old and New Testaments.

Text selection is determined by thematic relevance to kingship and messianic expectation within Israel's tradition and its reception in the New Testament. Passages such as 2 Samuel 7; Isaiah 9; Isaiah 11; Mark 1:15; Matthew 12:28; Luke 4:16-21; and Romans 9-11 are analyzed as theological units representing the historical and canonical development of Israel's covenantal hope toward its Christological articulation. Differences in literary genre, historical narrative, prophecy, Gospel, and epistle, are treated as integral to the dynamics of canonical testimony and interpreted within their

respective literary contexts. A narrative-canonical hermeneutical approach is employed to read Scripture as a theologically coherent whole while acknowledging its historical diversity. This approach focuses on how the texts, in their final canonical form, shape a narrative pattern of promise and fulfillment. Canonical tensions are not artificially harmonized but understood as part of the internal dialogue of the canon that deepens theological meaning.

Constructive theological reflection functions as a synthetic stage in which exegetical findings are articulated within a systematic theological framework. The validity of the argument is maintained through interpretive consistency, intertextual coherence, and engagement with contemporary academic discourse in biblical theology.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Christian theology does not emerge in a vacuum; it develops within the long narrative of God's relationship with His people. Christology, the Kingdom of God, and Israel are not three isolated doctrines but interwoven dimensions of a single redemptive

narrative. Each dimension carries a distinct theological function: Christ as the center, the Kingdom as the interpretive horizon, and Israel as the historical root of the story.

A canonical reading of Scripture, particularly in tracing the movement from the Old Testament to the New Testament, reveals a progressive disclosure of God's self-revelation—from God as the sovereign King of Israel to God embodied in Jesus Christ as the King whose presence is manifested within human history. This unfolding revelation constitutes what theologians describe as God's historical economy of redemption, through which divine purposes for humanity and creation are enacted.

This discussion traces that theological trajectory from the promise of kingship in the Old Testament to its fulfillment in Christ in the New Testament. Its aim is not merely to catalogue biblical data but to articulate the deeper theological significance of the narrative: that Christ, the Kingdom, and Israel together disclose the unity of God's faithful redemptive work from promise to fulfillment.

### **Old Testament Exegesis: Kingship Promise and Davidic Messianic Expectation**

The portrayal of divine kingship in the Old Testament emerges within concrete historical and political realities rather than as an abstract theological system. Israel's confession of YHWH as king developed alongside the nation's experience of monarchy, crisis, exile, and partial restoration. Any theological reading of messianic expectation must therefore attend to the historical tensions embedded within the texts themselves (Nari 2025).

The language of divine kingship in the Psalms (e.g., Ps 47; 93; 103) reflects Israel's attempt to articulate YHWH's sovereignty amid fragile political circumstances. These texts do not merely celebrate transcendence; they respond to instability by reasserting that Israel's ultimate ruler is not an earthly monarch but God. Psalm 103:19, which proclaims that YHWH's throne is established in heaven and rules over all, expands Israel's national theology into a cosmic claim. Yet this universal

vision coexists with the lived reality of political vulnerability (Brueggemann 1997, 215-23).

The Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7:12-16 introduces a decisive theological development by linking divine kingship with dynastic continuity. Historically, this text participates in royal ideology that sought to legitimize the Jerusalem monarchy. At the same time, its reception history reveals how later communities reinterpreted the promise amid the collapse of the Davidic throne. After the Babylonian exile, the assurance of an "eternal kingdom" could no longer function as straightforward political propaganda; it became a site of theological negotiation (Laoly 2025, 5-9). The promise was neither abandoned nor fulfilled in an obvious historical sense, generating an open horizon of expectation.

Prophetic texts such as Isaiah 9 and 11 intensify this tension. Rather than offering a single, linear prediction, these passages reimagine kingship within contexts of crisis and hope. Isaiah 9 portrays an ideal ruler whose reign embodies justice and peace, while Isaiah 11 envisions a Spirit-endowed figure emerging from

the stump of Jesse, a metaphor that presupposes political devastation. The imagery does not erase historical rupture; it presupposes it. As Brueggemann argues, such texts function as acts of theological resistance, asserting the possibility of moral and social reordering under divine authority (Brueggemann 1997 215-6).

Royal psalms (e.g., Psalms 2, 72, 89) further demonstrate the complexity of messianic expectation. These texts oscillate between court liturgy, political theology, and eschatological hope. Their vision of universal rule cannot be reduced to a stable program; it reflects an evolving attempt to interpret monarchy after its failure. The messianic motif thus emerges not as a fixed doctrine but as a dynamic interpretive field shaped by trauma, memory, and expectation.

Taken together, Old Testament exegesis reveals a multilayered theological structure. First, a theocratic dimension affirms YHWH's sovereignty over Israel and creation. Second, the Davidic promise generates a durable but contested hope for dynastic continuity. Third, prophetic rearticulation transforms

political kingship into an eschatological horizon that exceeds historical monarchy. These layers do not form a seamless progression but a textured dialogue within Israel's scriptures.

From a canonical perspective, this unresolved tension becomes the interpretive space within which later communities, including New Testament authors, reread Israel's traditions. The Old Testament does not function merely as a preliminary stage awaiting resolution; it preserves a theological grammar of hope whose openness invites ongoing interpretation.

### **New Testament Exegesis: Jesus and the Reconfiguration of the Kingdom of God**

When Jesus proclaims in Galilee that "the kingdom of God has drawn near" (Mark. 1:15), the announcement emerges within a dense matrix of Jewish eschatological expectation rather than as an abstract theological claim. First-century audiences lived under Roman imperial domination while sustaining hopes for divine intervention rooted in Israel's

scriptural traditions. The language of kingship therefore carried political as well as theological resonance. The Gospel traditions present Jesus' proclamation not merely as spiritual renewal but as a contested redefinition of authority within an intra-Jewish landscape shaped by competing visions of restoration (Longenecker 1989, 81-99).

The identification of Jesus as "son of David" (Matt. 1:1; Luke. 1:32-33) functions as a narrative strategy that situates him within Israel's royal memory. Yet the Gospels do not present a uniform interpretation of Davidic messianism. Mark's restrained Christology contrasts with Matthew's genealogical emphasis, while Luke frames Jesus' kingship within a universal horizon. Recent scholarship highlights that these differences reflect early community negotiations about how to articulate Jesus' identity amid Jewish and Gentile contexts (Nainggolan and Sumual 2023). Rather than a simple fulfillment schema, the New Testament witnesses to a process of reinterpretation in which inherited messianic language is reshaped by the

experience of Jesus' ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection.

### *Proclaiming the Kingdom*

The kingdom of God functions as a central but multivalent theme in Jesus' ministry. Parables, healings, exorcisms, and table fellowship operate as symbolic enactments of divine rule, yet their meaning remains contested within the narrative. As Ladd's inaugurated eschatology famously proposed, the kingdom is both present and future; however, more recent studies emphasize that this tension reflects apocalyptic discourse embedded in Second Temple Judaism rather than a fully systematized doctrine (Ladd 1996, 218-221).

Matthew 12:28 links exorcism to the arrival of God's reign, suggesting that the kingdom is experienced as disruptive power. At the same time, the Gospels portray persistent misunderstanding and resistance, indicating that the kingdom's presence does not eliminate ambiguity (Moltmann 1996, 320-5). Pneumatological language in these texts marks divine agency but does not resolve interpretive tension; instead, it intensifies debates about authority,

purity, and allegiance within Jewish society .

### *Jesus and Israel*

Jesus' statement that he is sent "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24) situates his mission within Israel's covenantal framework. Yet the narrative trajectory of the Gospels simultaneously gestures toward Gentile inclusion. Scholars increasingly read this movement not as replacement but as expansion within a contested field of Jewish identity formation. The early Jesus movement participated in ongoing debates about Torah, temple, and nationhood, rather than standing outside Judaism as a separate religion.

The so-called Great Commission (Matt 28:19) must therefore be interpreted within post-resurrection community memory, reflecting the early church's struggle to articulate continuity with Israel while legitimating Gentile mission. Wright (2018; 2023) argues that Jesus embodies Israel's vocation to be a light to the nations, yet this claim remains the subject of active scholarly dispute, particularly regarding how universalism interacts with covenantal particularity.

### *Paul and the Question of Israel*

Romans 9–11 remains one of the most contested passages in Pauline scholarship. Paul rejects the conclusion that Israel's unbelief nullifies God's promises, but interpreters disagree sharply on the implications. Some readings view the text as preserving a future role for ethnic Israel, while others interpret Paul's argument as redefining Israel around Christ-believing communities. The olive tree metaphor (Rm. 11:17-24) resists simplistic resolution: Gentiles are incorporated into Israel's covenantal root, yet the identity of that root remains debated (Dunn 1988, 682–85).

Contemporary discussions of supersessionism illustrate the complexity of the issue. Many scholars caution against projecting later theological categories back onto Paul, noting that his language oscillates between continuity and reconfiguration. Rather than offering a final doctrine of Israel, Romans 9–11 preserves a tension that reflects Paul's attempt to interpret salvation

history amid the unexpected inclusion of Gentiles (Longenecker 1989).

Taken together, New Testament exegesis reveals a layered theological discourse rather than a seamless fulfillment narrative. Christological claims about Jesus' kingship emerge through reinterpretation of Israel's traditions under conditions of political pressure and communal negotiation. Pneumatological language frames the kingdom as divine activity without dissolving historical conflict. Paul's reflections on Israel preserve unresolved tension between covenantal fidelity and eschatological transformation.

From a canonical perspective, these tensions do not weaken theological coherence; they constitute the interpretive space in which early Christian communities articulated the relationship between promise and fulfillment. The New Testament therefore functions not as a closed resolution of Israel's story but as an ongoing argument about how God's kingship is recognized in history.

**Constructive Integration: Christ, the Kingdom, and Israel in Biblical-**

### **Theological and Systematic Perspective**

The exegetical investigations above do not culminate in a simple doctrinal synthesis. Instead, they reveal a complex theological landscape in which continuity and rupture coexist. Any attempt at constructive integration must therefore resist the temptation of premature harmony. The relationship between Christ, the Kingdom of God, and Israel cannot be reduced to a linear narrative of fulfillment; it must be interpreted as a contested field in which early Christian communities struggled to articulate the meaning of divine kingship under conditions of historical trauma, imperial domination, and intra-Jewish debate.

The central argument of this section is that biblical theology does not move toward closure but toward structured tension. Integration is not achieved by dissolving conflict but by organizing it within a coherent interpretive framework. A viable theological model must account simultaneously for Christological confession, eschatological expectation, and the persistent theological presence of Israel. These three trajectories do not collapse into one

another; they mutually interpret and destabilize each other. Rather than presenting a final system, the following analysis proposes a constructive grammar for holding these tensions together.

### ***Christ as Israel's Messianic King: Identity and Reversal***

Early Christian proclamation did not merely add Jesus to Israel's existing categories; it reconfigured them from within. Bauckham thesis that Jesus is included in the unique divine identity of Israel's God represents one of the most significant developments in contemporary Christological scholarship (Bauckham 2008, 1-4, 42-5). Yet this claim must be read not as metaphysical speculation detached from history but as a response to the crisis generated by Jesus' execution.

The crucifixion poses a fundamental theological contradiction: the one confessed as Messiah is executed as a political criminal. The Gospels do not erase this scandal; they narrate it as the interpretive center of kingship (Wright 2013, 783-85). Jesus' authority is disclosed through vulnerability, and his enthronement occurs paradoxically

through humiliation. This inversion destabilizes both Roman imperial ideology and conventional Jewish messianic expectations.

Theologically, this means that Christological kingship cannot be assimilated to models of visible sovereignty. The reign of Christ is confessed before it is empirically demonstrated. The early church lived within the tension between proclamation and appearance: Jesus is Lord, yet Caesar remains in power. This unresolved contradiction becomes constitutive of Christian theology. Christ is king, but his kingship is mediated through suffering, witness, and eschatological anticipation rather than institutional domination (Fee 2007, 557-59).

Constructive integration must therefore reject triumphalist Christologies that read the resurrection as immediate political victory. Instead, it must affirm a cruciform kingship that remains historically ambiguous while theologically decisive.

### ***The Kingdom of God: Presence Without Possession***

The New Testament portrays the Kingdom of God not as a stable structure but as an interpretive event. Jesus' proclamation generates recognition, resistance, misunderstanding, and fragmentation. The kingdom appears as divine interruption rather than institutional continuity.

Moltmann's description of the church as a provisional sign preserves an essential insight: the church witnesses to a future it does not control (Jürgen Moltmann 1977, 191–92). However, the temptation within systematic theology has been to transform inaugurated eschatology into a total explanatory formula. The “already/not yet” schema risks becoming a metaphysical shortcut that smooths over narrative conflict.

A closer reading of the Gospels suggests that the presence of the kingdom intensifies division rather than dissolving it. Healings provoke controversy. Exorcisms generate accusations. Parables obscure as much as they reveal. The kingdom does not arrive as transparent fulfillment but as contested revelation. Its presence exposes competing interpretations of

God's action in history (Ladd 1993, 57–9).

This has profound ecclesiological consequences. If the kingdom remains contested within the Gospel narratives themselves, then no historical institution can claim unambiguous possession of it. The church exists within the ambiguity of participation. It enacts kingdom hope through fragile practices of justice, reconciliation, and hospitality, yet it remains subject to critique from the very narrative it proclaims (Eleven 2021). Integration must therefore preserve the distinction between kingdom and church while affirming their relational proximity. The church interprets the kingdom; it does not contain it.

### ***Israel: Persistence, Rupture, and Eschatological Excess***

The question of Israel prevents Christian theology from stabilizing too quickly. Romans 9-11 interrupts any attempt to read salvation history as smooth progression. Paul's anguish over Israel exposes a theological problem that cannot be solved by doctrinal fiat. Divine fidelity and historical unbelief coexist without resolution.

Modern debates about supersessionism often seek decisive conclusions: either Israel is replaced or permanently affirmed. Yet Paul's argument refuses such binary clarity. His language oscillates between continuity and transformation. The olive tree metaphor sustains both inclusion and warning. Gentiles are grafted in, but they do not become the root.

This ambiguity is not a defect in Pauline theology; it is its theological power. Israel remains a living sign that God's promises exceed human systems of interpretation. The persistence of Jewish existence outside Christian confession destabilizes any Christian claim to final possession of salvation history (Wright 2002, 687–90).

To integrate Israel constructively is therefore to accept theological incompleteness. Israel represents eschatological excess, a reminder The narrative is unfinished. Christian theology cannot close what God has left open.

***Toward a Theological Framework of Structured Tension***

The constructive proposal of this study is intentionally resistant to closure. Rather than a synthesis, it offers a framework of disciplined tension organized around three claims:

Christology rooted in Israel. Jesus is intelligible only within Israel's narrative, yet his interpretation of that narrative generates rupture as well as fulfillment. Christology emerges as a site of reinterpretation rather than completion.

The Kingdom as an eschatological horizon. God's reign is confessed as present and future, but never possessed. Its manifestation remains historically mediated and contested. Israel as unresolved witness. The persistence of Israel prevents theological finality and sustains the openness of Christian eschatology (Vlach 2010, 231–33).

Integration, in this sense, is not the elimination of conflict but its theological articulation. Biblical theology does not culminate in harmony but in an interpretive discipline that learns to inhabit unresolved promises. The unity of Christ, Kingdom, and Israel is

therefore not a finished doctrinal system but an ongoing commitment to read Scripture as a space where divine faithfulness exceeds human closure.

## **CONCLUSSION AND RECOMENDATION**

This study has argued that Christology cannot be adequately understood apart from the intertwined frameworks of the Kingdom of God and the theological significance of Israel. The biblical-theological analysis demonstrates that New Testament Christology emerges from within Israel's covenantal narrative rather than replacing it. The figure of Jesus is interpreted as the reconfiguration of Israel's messianic hope, not as its cancellation. In this sense, promise and fulfillment are not arranged as a simple linear progression but as a dynamic relationship marked by continuity, reinterpretation, and eschatological openness.

The Kingdom of God, as disclosed in the ministry of Jesus, is presented not merely as a future expectation but as a historically mediated reality that generates ethical

and communal transformation. Its presence is simultaneously affirming and destabilizing: affirming in its proclamation of divine sovereignty and destabilizing in its refusal to be contained within any institutional structure. The church participates in this kingdom not as its possessor but as its witness. The tension between presence and fulfillment remains constitutive of Christian existence.

The persistence of Israel within the theological horizon of the New Testament further prevents premature doctrinal closure. Rather than functioning as a superseded precursor, Israel remains an interpretive and eschatological reference point that challenges Christian theology to account for divine fidelity beyond ecclesial boundaries. The relationship between Israel and the church is therefore best understood not as resolution but as ongoing negotiation within salvation history.

Taken together, these findings contribute to a model of biblical theology that resists totalizing synthesis. The unity of Christ, Kingdom, and Israel is not a finished doctrinal system but a disciplined engagement with unresolved

theological tensions. Such a framework allows for constructive theological reflection without erasing the historical and textual complexities that give rise to it.

Future research should explore more deeply the ecclesiological implications of the Kingdom of God, particularly how the church negotiates its identity as a participant in, rather than owner of, divine kingship within pluralistic and technologically mediated societies. Further investigation is also needed into the missiological dimensions of Kingdom Christology, especially in relation to intercultural theology and global Christianity.

Additional studies could examine the evolving theological relationship between Israel and the church in contemporary contexts, engaging Jewish-Christian dialogue and post-supersessionist frameworks. Expanding this line of inquiry would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of covenant, election, and eschatological hope within modern theology.

Finally, future work should consider how Kingdom theology can inform practical theological

disciplines, including pastoral care, social ethics, and public theology, in ways that remain faithful to biblical tensions while addressing contemporary social realities.

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