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# **PROMISE AND FULFILLMENT (PATRIARCHAL PERIOD)**

**– PhD THESIS –**

**ABSTRACT**

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The covenants or God promises are one of the main elements of the book of Genesis and the Holy Scriptures. This element has been present in the biblical space since the creation of the world, when God gives the first promise to the forefathers, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28). There is a clear parallel between this first promise that the Lord makes to our forefathers and the promise that the Lord makes to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, namely, that “I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.” (Gen 13:16). This is a promise that we will see repeated many times among the patriarchs.

The divine invitation in Genesis 1:28 to prosperity, fertility, and universality can be seen as a plan that God had from the beginning for His chosen people; This plan will be progressively realized with Abraham and his offspring by the End of the Ages. In the beginning they were all „very good” (Gen 1:31), but the sin entered the world through disobedience and the „Good” has seen its antinomic face, the evil; the earth has become barren, the birth painful, the love passionate, the first pair of brothers is marked by the fratricide of Cain, and Lamech proclaims the principle of vengeance which is the principle of multiplied evil. God intervenes and changes the course of the history by choosing a man of history, Abraham, through whom this struggle between good and evil, although it will continue, will know the victory of good, and by the will of God, even the evil, is a force for good.

From the very first pages of the Holy Scriptures, God makes promises, and His promise is firm, eternal, and with concrete results in time that He has set for the passage of the world and of man. God promises and totally fulfils His promises; some of the promises have already been fulfilled, but others will be fulfilled in Eschaton. God wants the man to be His partner, independently of his situation, and a partaker of eternal happiness. The revelation of God in the Old Testament outlines the dimension of mercy, which is especially highlighted in the New Testament, and also the paternal dimension – as a Father, who listens and understands, who promises and fulfils promises, who actually becomes a friend, that is unacceptable in any other monotheistic religion where transcendence does not mix with immanence.

Every time Abraham finds himself in a difficult situation, God intervene in a discreet way. We can notice this in the promise that he makes with His much-desired son, a promise that describes the universalism of the act of salvation (Gen12:1-3). The promises are all linked to each other and are united by a single great promise made by the One true God, the one of

the family from the ancestral past of the patriarchs, which guarantees the continuity of life and prosperity for the people. God is directly connected with everything that happens on the Earth. The Earth is the only world known to harbour life; from the earth we come, from the earth we grow and from its fruits we feed. To the same earth we shall return after death and will host our body until the second coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ. God does not identify with the earth, but reveals Himself through it, so He blesses us and gives us His support.

According to the Elohist source, the patriarchs are the connoisseurs of God's plan. God's plan is revealed to them. What we experience now is a mixture of the past, the present and the future. Whatever happens, the promise is an essential part of God's plan and that plan will be revealed to the people in different ways. Everlasting, the plan of God is the premise of the existence of a promise always open to people. People are always in the centre of God's plan.

The text of the promise in the Book of Genesis 22:18 is centred around a standard formula: „and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” In the second part he focuses on a similarity, a correlation with Genesis 26:5: „because he obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions.” this becomes a major obligation, that of keeping the word of God so that the promise may be fulfilled.

The Berit or the covenant will be kept in the enlarged Israel – that means in the whole world and the whole cosmos – because God does not abandon His creation and does not forget his promise. God's blessing has two major effects: transforming Israel into the chosen people and giving it a great name. These two themes are related as they evoke the connection that exists between the narrative of the patriarchs and the narrative of Israel as a nation. The blessing that God promised to Abraham has two effects: a. On Abraham himself as a person, b. in Israel as a nation (great nation, great name) and all the other people who will come in contact with Israel and his descendants. Each person will receive God's blessing according to the attitude that they have toward Abraham, God's chosen one, and the blessing will also have a progressive aspect in the sense that it will generate other blessings for those who will receive them. The person who honours Abraham will worship God.

The wonderful thing in the case of the divine promises is given by the creation of an image of God as being the superlative good. The Word cannot emphasize the greatness of God's goodness that springs from the promises he makes. The divine promises contain all the attributes of God, without them nothing would be accomplished from what has been accomplished and nothing would be fulfilled from what has been accomplished. that is why St.

John the Evangelist says that: „All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3) because „For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17). This is the message of the Old Testament: the New Testament is the framework in which the promises of the Old Testament are fulfilled, being oriented towards eschatology, in Christ and through Christ, who will be all in all. The four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) argue in their gospels that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. Jesus Christ is God's promise to His people. His people have waited for Him from generation to generation, making this message to go through, like a red thread, through all the books of the Old Testament.

There where Adam and Israel stumbled, Messiah fulfilled, being faithful to God in all things. This makes the Holy Apostle Paul exclaim that: „Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name” (Phil 2:7). Christ the Messiah is the son of Abraham whom God requires as a sacrifice, the Prophet promised by Moses, the foreshadowed King of David and the divine Son promised by Isaiah and Daniel, the One who welcomes and defeats the devil in the wilderness of Qarantania (Mt 4:4) with the power of God. Jesus Christ is the true Word of God made flesh (Jn 1:1-14). Thereby, after the ascension of Christ to heaven, the Acts of the Apostles shows that His presence in the world continues until the end of the ages, through the Church. The Acts show how the last great promise made in the Old Testament (Joel 2:28) regarding the Descent of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled.

We notice how the promises made in the Old Testament are fulfilled one by one in Acts 15: 13-18, and this pattern is visible throughout the New Testament: Jesus is the new Adam. Jesus is the Only Righteous One (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus is greater than Moses (Jn 1:17; Heb 3: 1-6) and greater than David (Mt 22: 41-45), and Abraham will rejoice in that day when he sees him (Jn 8:56) -58). So, in the New Testament, the promises made in the pages of the Old Testament are the promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament mentioned the promises concerning Christ, and in the New Testament all this promise is fulfilled. In other words, we honour the whole of Holy Scripture because it speaks of Christ in all its contents; Scripture is the portrait of Christ. We honour the whole of Holy Scripture because it speaks of Christ in all its contents; the Holy Scripture is the portrait of Christ.

What stands out with the coming of the Messiah is not only the appearance that He came to restore the image of Adam, but the fact that He came to gather near Himself a new chosen people, a people of a new covenant that brings testimony of the approach of the Chalice, the sign of the new covenant (Mk 16:16). In New Testament is shown the message of the new covenant, by the Apostles and especially by the Holy Apostle Paul who tells the Ephesians that

they were saved by the new covenant (Eph 2: 8-9), which is similar to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:18) and the Romans (Rom 5:9).

God's new people, the people of the new covenant, are characterized by freedom and light as opposed to other peoples who are characterized by unbelief and darkness. God's plan in the New Testament, extended to all creation, is for His will to be fulfilled. The Lord's Prayer contains a summary of this desideratum: „Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10), which means that prayer is a call to fulfil the promises made now and forever. ever. The Holy Apostle Peter also confesses that: „We look to the things to come, to a new heaven and a new earth” (2 Pt 3:13).

The research objectives are:

- to bring knowledge to the fact that the Old Testament promises lead to the creation of a theology of promise, so significant for the history of the salvation of humanity.
- to offer truthfulness to the theological premises regarding the covenant and its history which is centred around the representation of the ideal of approaching and regaining the relationship with God.
- to bring arguments as close as possible to the fullness the theological positions regarding the relationship between the promise and the covenant, a relationship outlined in the area of the meeting of the sacred with the profane, of God with the fallen man.
- to open new lines of interpretation regarding the patriarchal ascension from the perspective of faith, confessed through actions and obedience.
- to note the positions of Jewish and Christian theology (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant) regarding the „berit” (covenant) and to highlight its presence after accepting the promise.
- to observe the type-antitype relations existing in the history presented by the pages of the Old Testament, especially in the life of the patriarchs – all these relations being the fruit of promises and the confession of justice by deeds.

I considered this theme to be providential due to its vast extensions to all the books of the Holy Scripture, with anthropological accents regarding Eshaton. Of course, much has been written so far and will be written even more from now on, given the dimensions of the topic in theological research but not only, but I considered it auspicious to present explicit references in the development of the theme of the promise, references that I tried to present in a representative exegetical coat.

One of the Spanish theologians (Jose Luis Sicre) who devoted himself to this subject, compares the vastness of the subject with a wonderful large lake that the viewer has before

him. The reader is urged first to admire the lake in all its splendour and then to investigate the details regarding its geological formation, dimensions, depth, etc.

In the development of the work I aim to develop in the first part etymologically and theologially the relationship between the promise and the covenant. To observe the manifestations of this report in the pages of Holy Scripture and to capture the expectant character that this report inserts in human life. In this sense, I will deal with the reception of the theme of the promise in the Old Testament and I will notice the involvement of this theme in shaping Pauline theology and New Testament descriptions in general.

In the second part of the paper, keeping an upward approach, I will try to objectify every remarkable promise in the pages of the book of Genesis. To this end, I will present from a historical point of view the biography of some characters (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph) who fully enjoyed God's promises, knowing their fulfilment. Some of those mentioned even enjoy fulfilling their promises, guaranteeing them, and placing them forever through covenants, but I will mention all these aspects at the right time.

Concluding the paper, I will try to outline the theme of this paper in the sphere of reference to biblical concepts. I believe that by presenting a pattern of the promises and covenants in the book of Genesis, I will be able to draw the so-called „theme of promise,” which I will point out as present in the pages of the New Testament, fulfilled in them, while identifying the meaning of this theme. It being a *leit-scriptural* motive.

The bibliography is largely Western, focusing on Spanish theology that has delved deeply into this topic and others in the Old Testament. In fact, Spanish research is advanced and reference in terms of major themes of the Old Testament. Although there is a bibliographic sufficiency in this area, I also consulted various comments on the verses I mentioned throughout the paper and considered them essential in describing the theme of the promise; so we considered collections such as: WBC, Continental Commentary, NICOT, NAC, Handbook, JPS, ACSS etc ..

All the references in the footnotes evoke the multitude of Western theologians who have leaned on this subject, and the originality of the thesis lies precisely in the exposition of the details they noticed on the subject. Each theologian presents this chapter from an existential, analytical, morphological-syntactic, theological point of view; practically this makes the beauty of the treated subject much more obvious. I used various editions of the Holy Scripture, books, and specialized studies from the Romanian space, as well as compact works of theological orientation: bibliographic guides, collections, dictionaries. I also used Jewish, patristic, biblical commentary resources, all listed at the end of the paper and in the footnotes.

The theme of promises and accomplishments is widely debated in Spanish literature, as are many of the Old Testament themes. One of the modern theologians is **Jose Luis Sicre** who compares the depth of the text with the admiration of a lake and not with the problem of its formation. He is one of the modern Spanish theologians who enters directly into the problem, comparing this with the two options to climb Mount Massad: on foot in a zig-zag, with effort and risk, or by cable car in a few minutes, then having the opportunity to admire landscape. He often invites the reader to descend and ascend the slope at the foot, like the biblical investigation, which must be seen in the light of those who have dedicated themselves to this fact over the years.

The Catholic author (Sicre) shows that: The theme of the descendants gets accomplished in Abraham in a dramatically way; The final destiny points out the theology of the liberation; It puts as in a bundle with the oldest traditions, in connection with the moving to the fulfilled world and with the danger humankind had to deal to reach it. This shows us that, in fact, between the two blocks of the book of making (Gen 1/11, 12/48) exists an intrinsic bond which is briefly represented with Abraham, the protagonist, in a dark light. This is how Abraham, by not human efforts but by God's help, doubles his faith and listening capability and becomes such an important ecumenical figure.

The theologian **Xavier Pikaza** uses a key word to show Abraham's movement toward the God of his fathers: the „ambit or universe” of the revelation of divinity. That means that by listening to the voice of God, Abraham allows himself to be introduced into the ambit where God acts, this ambit is clearly visible in the words of the verses 2 and 3. The theologian analyses the 5 types of future in Hebrew grammar that are all closely related to the Patriarch's ability to come out of his land and go to the promised homeland. (I will convert you; I will bless you, I will raise, I will bless, I will curse). According to the theologians quoted before, the emphasis is on the last sentence: „all the nations of the earth will be blessed through you” (12: 3). Therefore, it all culminates in the last verse and we can notice this fact when we observe the grammatical structure of the Hebrew language which makes the emphasis fall on the last verb. The exit from the homeland is only the beginning before the beginning there was only the divine word.

The converging lines all lead to the same conclusion that is like other theologians: obedience and faith are the premises of God's work on him. The theologian emphasizes the personality of Abraham and shows that he and his followers is a way by which God's blessing is transmitted. The first 11 chapters of Genesis are dominated by the Curse (the curse get to dominate the universe (Gen 3:14) starting with chapter 12 we can notice a radical shift: is when



Abraham appears and the universal blessing is on the whole cosmos. Although beginning with chapter 12 we can see the focus on a certain nation (Israel), yet the blessing is not reserved only for the holy people but for all the people of the earth. We must understand the Blessing that was promised to Abraham in the light of the Curse that was described in the previous chapters.

In response to the sin that was committed in the Garden of Eden, Abraham's blessing is the possibility of reaching to live a free and happy life. Human life stands on a thread where you have two options: the curse and the blessing. The Yahweh document of promise and fulfilment describes two main themes: the promise becomes a way of God's blessing that was transmitted through Abraham to the rest of the people; what is the relationship between the „yahwist” document and the Davidic promises, especially since the document was written during this period?

The theologian sheds light on the obedience of Abraham and clearly emphasizes that by listening to the Divine Voice Abraham intuits God's will and allows himself to be conquered by Him, like a mountain that the more you try to conquer, the more unfathomable and unconquerable it becomes.

The fundamental premise is obedience so that other virtues may emerge from the fruits of obedience. The culmination, according to the Jewish text, is found in the final text: „Because of you all the nations of the earth will be blessed,,” The quoted theologian remarks and emphasizes that the total fulfilment of promises by God must be followed by man's answer; if this is missing God will go away. Always after God promises comes the answer from man which consists in building altars and offering sacrifices (animals). Ratification sometimes comes with a visible sign (the presence of a rainbow or smoke). Promises are always open; Blessing is the work of God. Only God can give it, but at the same time it is conditioned by human will. In the vision of the theologians quoted before, only by fulfilling the divine law, man becomes a participant in the great and absolute blessing. The quintessence of the three Patriarchs is this: the word of God is a promise and is addressed to them and their descendants forever, but for them to be fulfilled it takes obedience which is the first great demand. God is the basis of all people and not the man.

An important aspect stressed by Pikaza is the fact that the promises concerning the homeland and the descendants are related therefore the God of Abraham and Isaac comes and presents himself as the Lord of the promises of the homeland and of many descendants. In Genesis 12: 1-3, the Lord promises Abram two supreme goods: a family and a homeland. The Lord's promise appears in close connection with a holy oath by which God swears that his sons will be the heirs of the earth (Gen 15:13-15) and the Lord becomes the guarantor of their

existence (Gen 28:13). Within this framework, the religion of Israel extends and reflects the experience of a promise that keeps alive the hope of the people until the end of the ages and beyond any end that is a new beginning. Regarding the conversion of other people, which would be the last part of the promise that was fulfilled, the Judaism beliefs are that the time has not come yet for other peoples to convert; this event depends only on the power of God.

The theologian Xavier Pickaza concludes that God's promise in the Old Testament can be interpreted in three different ways: a) as an oath, b) as a covenant, c) and finally as compassion which becomes a leit-motive not only in the New Testament but also in the Old Testament and makes the link between the two testaments with this supreme attribute of God.

Another important theologian is **Felix Garcia Lopez** who in his study „Pentateuch” shows that promises can filter like water through all the patriarchal writings. He divides the promises mathematically into five categories: The promises of a Son (Gen 15,4; 16,11; 17,16; 19,21; 18,10-140; The promises of some descendants (12,2; 13,16; 15,5; 16,10; 17,2; 21,12-13; 22,16-18; 24,4.24; 28,14; 35,11; 46,3; 48,4); The promise of a homeland (12,1-7)13,14-15; 15,7; 13,16-18; 17,8; 24,7; 26,2-4; 28,13-15; 35,12; 48,4; 50,24; The promise of assistance 26,3-24; 28,15; 31,3; 46,4; 48,21; 50,24); The promise of blessing (12,2-3; 17,16-20; 22,17-18; 26,4.24; 28,14). The blessing will give the man power, stability and prosperity. The blessing takes the form of a promise that God makes and the man „compromises”, that means that he gives his word before the Almighty God.

**Francisco Varo** is another important theologian who comments on the book of Genesis in a spiritual manner like the holy Cappadocian fathers. This author assumes that in the case of Abraham, everything is uncertain, and that this uncertainty envelops the Patriarch throughout his life. The author emphasizes that the Genesis book was transmitted orally long before the first manuscript was written. God's free choice of the people of Israel is an aspect that the author treats in depth. God makes a promise and through that promise God creates his chosen people. The way God works is special: He chooses whom He wishes on behalf of the people, to be the depositors of His promises and the instruments of His saving work. In return, God asks for a full trust in his actions. In the opinion of the above-mentioned theologian, all this is looking to the New Testament and find the fullness in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word.

**Elorza Jose Luis** is another famous theologian due to his analysis of the Bible stories in the purest human style. He states that „the Pentateuch is prophetic in the sense that God speaks to us in the most humane style.” He argues above all for an existential reading of the Old Testament, invoking two reasons in this regard: what is described are existential elements of people and secondly, they were written from the perspective of the human existence of the

faithful man. All of this shows the testimonial, existential, and interrogative value of the Old Testament. In his work he wants to show that the human history is a drama and not a tragedy that offers a synthetic view of the Old Testament. We can point out that the promise-covenant connection and its fulfilment are part of the central structure of the Old Testament along with other central themes such as: justice, family, royalty, brotherhood, and their main objective is the highlighting of the covenant between God and his people.

The promises are described, as can be seen throughout the paper, depending on the people to whom they are addressed. God does not hesitate to be extremely open to human desires and responds to the prayers of those who seek promises wisely and fully. We have the most conclusive example in Abraham, who, in the sincerity of his desire to have a descendant, repeatedly received the promise from God (Acts 12: 1-3; 15: 7-21; 18: 10-14). that the son he will have will bear witness to the beginning of the manifestation of God's plan of restructuring in the world, through the world. For this reason, of the fullness of the promises and of the fullness of their fulfilment, I chose to draw the profile of an Old Testament theme that I consider eminently vital to the development of the divine plan.

In the first part of the paper I tried to highlight the relationship between the promise and the covenant, both from an etymological, historical and biblical point of view, led by the hope that a wider frame of reference would be auspicious in explaining interdependence. between the two concepts. Promise is a transcendental concept, a concept that starts with man, with his creation and remains with him until the end of his existence. The covenant is either an image of the promise or a necessity for its expression. God works by covenants less than he does by promises, but this does not mean that by their characters one predominates, or the other is absent, but that these two concepts define the fallen man's relationship with God. From the etymological point of view, during the first part of the paper we could observe that the Hebrew term, "berit", is the one that defines by its semantic multiple meaning, as good a promise as the covenant. For this reason, I consider that, from a terminological point of view, I have opened a wide range of interpretations regarding the relationship between the promise and the covenant and concluded that no matter how much we try to define these concepts in isolation, they can approach the intended understanding. the author of the scriptural text only when they are interpreted contextually and in relation to similar events.

Starting from this interpretive reality, we presented in symmetry reports events that include the most important Old Testament promises present in the book of Genesis. From Noah, through the rabbinic and patristic interpretation I tried to highlight a natural course of promises, a course governed by the same principles in Acts 3:15, and even the primordial ones

in Acts 1:28: “Grow and multiply and fill the earth and – submit to him”. These directives given to the ancestors seem to have remained in a pathological form, if we can call it that, as the ideals of the fallen man. They represented needs that God naturally rebuilt and clothed in promises. In these first references to the promise offered by the book of Genesis, I identified the first principles of building a theology of promise, a concept I developed in the last chapter of my paper, where, on thematic substructures, I highlighted the reception promises made by the chosen people and the purpose created around them. I consider extremely important this presentation of the ideational restructuring of the chosen people on the basis of the promises and in the light of the presentation of this concept I consider that I have opened some lines of interpretation regarding the Israel outlined around the promises.

Around this idea of promise, concentrating my attention on the exegetical landmarks offered by the collections of commentaries, I managed to create a lexical field easily identifiable in the biblical space that would provide understanding about promise. From this point of view, I consider the work to be a guide to the connection with God based on the promises. If, historically, promises are not notable events, theologically they are vital in defining the man who is in „God's grace.” I considered this remarkable and brought into question the fact that Noah was considered righteous and testified through his life about this only in the context in which he was subjected to God's plan (Acts 6). His faith was on an upward slope, but Noah was less aware of the value that God's account had for him (Acts 6: 9). While Noah's faith was confessed by God's covenant with him, in Abraham we speak of a rising faith, descriptive of the potential for creating a covenant, but defining for obtaining it only when it reaches its apogee. For this reason, Abraham was „built” around the promises (Acts 15:16). Isaac, Iacov and Iosif are the patriarchs that I mentioned during the paper and I considered it auspicious to build the concept of promise based on the humanity expressed by them. Starting from Noah and reaching Joseph, we noticed that there are three defining factors for receiving a promise: faith, which we will observe as governing among the virtues and approaches to approaching God; justice, which is considered to be imperative in the manifestation of the fallen man; universality or openness to the universal, which I considered to be a key note in receiving a full promise. Even if these three pillars are manifested differently in Noah and in each of the mentioned patriarchs, they represent sine qua non conditions for regaining the primordial state.

Above all this is Christ, the One to whom every scriptural interpretation tends in a certain way. If the promises are represented by the earth (Canaan) or prosperity (wealth) this is due to the path that Christ needs for his reception in the world as the Messiah. For this reason,

the end of my work also tries to identify a messianic perspective that, without a doubt, is manifested by each of the people with whom God makes covenants and to whom he puts promises before.

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