

Understanding Conflict in the Middle East—Part One

Why do the Israelis and Palestinians place so much attention on having a homeland in the geographic region called Palestine? Will there ever be an end to the conflicts and political tensions between the Israelis and the Arab world?

Israel's continuing presence in the Middle East, particularly in the region of Palestine, was affirmed by the Apostle Paul who explained in an allegory that a new national covenant will someday be mediated by Christ for the twelve tribes of Israel at Jerusalem. Making it certain then that the modern-day Israelis and Palestinian Arabs, and many other nations and peoples, will continue to have a concerned interest in the issues affecting the geopolitical stability of the Middle East.

Now it was told to Abraham that in "Isaac shall they seed be called," which meant that among the children of Abraham there would be only one lineage associated with the promises that included a landed inheritance in the region of Palestine. And the Apostle Paul reiterated this fact when he referred to the one "seed"—Isaac (lineally)—whose descendants would receive the landed inheritance promised to Abraham. And so we find by God's promise that Isaac's son Jacob and

Jacob's descendants (Israel) eventually became the qualified recipients of a landed inheritance in Palestine some years after their journeys out of Egypt (Gen. 15:7; 28:13; Deut. 34:4).

However, when the time came for the people of ancient Israel to inherit the land of Palestine, we see that God established a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai, and this covenant was founded upon certain stipulations—the Ten Commandments—and these commandments created an uncompromising issue in regard to the promises. Because it was obvious to the people of ancient Israel and to their descendants—and to us today—that it is impossible to unfailingly keep the Ten Commandments.

Therefore, these "commandments," respective to the first covenant, came to be seen as an opposition to the inheritance because the Ten Commandments only served to prove that the people of ancient Israel were unworthy inheritors of the Land of Promise. A situation that prompted the Apostle Paul to address the issue of how these commandments, and there covenantal introduction at Mt. Sinai, were still not able to nullify the fulfillment of the promises even though the fault was revealed in the people by the commandments of God.

And so the Apostle Paul said that: “as a man I say it, even of man a confirmed covenant no one doth make void or doth add to, and to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed; He doth not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to thy seed,’ which is Christ; and this I say, A covenant confirmed before by God to Christ, the law, that came four hundred and thirty years after, doth not set aside, to make void the promise, for if by law be the inheritance, it is no more by promise, but to Abraham through promise did God grant it” (Gal. 3:15-18, YLT).

[Author’s emphasis throughout.]

Simply, Paul is telling us that the covenant and its ritual laws and its stipulations—the Ten Commandments—became binding in a national agreement that was mediated by Moses for the people of ancient Israel at Mt. Sinai. And even though the people of ancient Israel broke the covenant, and the foundational stipulations, and were forced to eventually forfeit their inheritance in Palestine, the Apostle Paul assures us that the stipulations could not “set aside” the promise of a landed inheritance for the people of ancient Israel and their descendants relative to Isaac. (It is an incorrect argument to say that Paul was not referring also to the Ten Commandments.)

Implying then that the fulfillment of the covenant by promise for all the tribes of Israel

would have to be brought forward to the time after the resurrection from the dead when a new national covenant would be mediated by Jesus at Jerusalem (I Tim. 2:5).

Implying further that the Ten Commandments remain to bring a judgment against those who will be under the administration of the new covenant that will be ratified with all those who will be considered to be of the lineage of Isaac. A conclusion that is of course understood—in part—from the Apostle Paul’s rhetorical question when he asked: “Do we then make void the law through faith?” And Paul answered by saying: “God forbid: yea, we establish the law [by faith]” (Rom. 3:31).

Affirming for us that the Apostle Paul unreservedly confirmed the continuance of the Ten Commandments in a coming new national covenant that will include the promise of the holy spirit, and the gift of eternal life for those qualified by God to be worthy inheritors of the kingdom of God (Gal. 3:8-9). That is to say that by means of the sacrifice of Christ and by the indwelling of the spirit of God all who are willing can be qualified by God the Father to become worthy inheritors of the kingdom of his son, Jesus. (Reconciliation with God would be by necessity defined in the context of the Ten Commandments.)

Giving us then the expectation that the new national covenant made with the twelve tribes

of Israel would be ratified with the same stipulations that were in the first covenant—the Ten Commandments—for all those who are regarded as heirs of the promises like Isaac.

Which brings us to examine Paul's allegory as it relates to Sarah and Hagar, and also to Abraham's two sons, Isaac and Ishmael.

Now Abraham had a firstborn son, Ishmael, by Sarah's Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, which made Ishmael the heir to Abraham's estate, but not a firstborn heir according to the promise of a landed inheritance because the promise was to the child born of Sarah (Gen. 17:19). Therefore when Isaac was born, he not only became the heir to Abraham's estate—replacing Ishmael as the heir—he became the recipient of God's promise of a landed inheritance that would include the modern-day region of Palestine.

Giving us something important to consider in regard to the nature of the promises afforded to Abraham and the descendants of Isaac.

Because the covenant by promise was inherently an exclusive covenant respective to the family of Abraham.

Consequently, those who were not of the “seed” of Abraham through Isaac were outside the promise of a landed inheritance and outside the promise of eternal life, except

they should somehow become a part of the family of Abraham (Eph. 2:11-13).

Telling us then that the promise of a landed inheritance and the promise of eternal life in the kingdom of God are mutually inclusive in what was promised to Abraham. Meaning the promise of a landed inheritance in Palestine has far-reaching geopolitical consequences for the future of the world (Rom. 4:13). (Abraham did not own land in Palestine when Isaac was born and so the nature of the promises implied a resurrection from the dead at Christ's return.)

Which makes for a rather outstanding conclusion that is undoubtedly found in Scripture.

Now in his allegory the Apostle Paul stated that Abraham had two sons: “the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise” (Gal. 4:22-23). Which meant that the son born to Hagar the bondwoman came about by Sarah's decision because Hagar was able to bear a son for Abraham, and Isaac was born by reason of God's intervention because Sarah was not able to bear children.

Nonetheless, even though Ishmael was indeed a firstborn son of Abraham, he still retained the status of a “bondservant” respective to

Abraham's estate when Sarah gave birth to the heir-apparent who was Isaac.

Thus, in this historical context, the lives of Sarah and Hagar became allegorically representative of two covenants—the first covenant that was mediated by Moses at Mt. Sinai (represented by Hagar), and the second covenant that will be mediated by Jesus at Jerusalem (represented by Sarah). For Paul said that these, the bondwoman and the freewoman, are: “an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar [Hagar]. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:22-26). (Jesus is now the mediator of those who have a personal covenant with God because they have a “freewoman,” the “Jerusalem” that is “above,” which is the “mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22).)

So, then, we see that Paul, by an allegory, associated the life of the bondwoman Hagar—the mother of Ishmael—with the first covenant and its administration at Mt. Sinai. Then relatively Paul associated the new national covenant and its administrative seat at Jerusalem with the freewoman Sarah—the mother of Isaac. A concept that posed a confounding problem for those who could not accept the idea of a personal covenant with

God through Christ because there were Jewish leaders who recognized that the first covenant was still nationally applicable in the time of Paul's ministry. (Those who have a personal covenant with God now reflect the spiritual nature of the coming new national covenant that will be made with all Israel.)

Bringing us then to briefly examine how the old and new covenants relate to our personal covenant with God through Christ.

From an historical perspective we know that Hagar and Ismael were banished from the family of Abraham, which became a public act that demonstrated that Isaac would be the heir-apparent to the estate of Abraham. Noting then that this casting out of the bondwoman Hagar by the freewoman Sarah became the “solution” to prove that Isaac was the designated recipient of a landed inheritance in Palestine. Which conveys to us that the coming new national covenant is able to displace the first covenant established at Mt. Sinai, being allegorically understood from the fact that Sarah had the authority to “cast out” the bondwoman Hagar (Gen. 21:10-14).

Allowing Paul to conclude that those who have a personal covenant with God through Christ now, and those who come under a new national covenant in the future, are not under the administration of the first covenant that was ratified at Mt. Sinai. A point made in

Paul's allegory when he said: "Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free" (Gal. 4:30-31). (The casting out of the first covenant respective to our personal covenant with God does not make the Ten Commandments obsolete in regard to what defines our reconciliation with God.)

Thus Paul concluded that those who rejected a personal covenant with God in wanting to keep the first covenant were obligated to fulfill the "whole law" in regard to that covenant, including circumcision and the sacrificial laws conducted by the priests of Israel. And Paul also made it clear that if they chose the first covenant over a personal covenant with God through Christ, they would be—respective to the inheritance of eternal life—likened to the bondservant Ishmael.

Making the life of Ishmael allegorically representative of those who are under the administration of the first covenant because that covenant could only "engender" bondservants and not heirs to the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:2-5). Making then the life of Isaac allegorically representative of those who now have the holy spirit, and also allegorically representative of those who will be under the administration of the new

national covenant that will be ratified in the future with the twelve tribes of Israel and all those regarded as heirs of the promises like Isaac.

Implying of course that the inheritors of the kingdom of God would have to be as the "seed" of Abraham, which is to say that they would have to be adopted into the family of Abraham to be recognized as a legitimate heir to the promises—the mutually inclusive promises of a landed inheritance and eternal life in the kingdom of God (Rom. 8:16; Gal. 3:29). For Paul stated that: "ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ [become children of God]. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:26-29). (See also, Gal. 4:7.)


Therefore, in this context the Apostle Paul concluded that: "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise" (Gal. 4:28). Which means that all who accept the sacrifice of Christ and receive the holy spirit can be qualified of God to become heirs to the kingdom of God, becoming children of God in the context of being an heir to the promises like Abraham's son Isaac. Or, simply, we must become a brother or sister to Jesus by an adoption through the spirit of God, and by

this adoption we become as Jesus was and is respective to the promises because Jesus—as the qualified heir to the throne of David—was and is of the “seed” of Abraham (Mt. 1:1; Jn. 1:12-13).

Allowing the Apostle Paul to conclude that Abraham will be the “father of us all” because he will be the “heir of the world,” which means that the spiritual nature of the promises also express a rather striking geopolitical nature that has significant consequences for the future of the world—beginning at Jerusalem (Rom. 4:13-16; Gal. 4:28).

Summarily then we can say that Paul’s allegory associated Sarah and Hagar with the two covenants, and this allegory also associated Isaac and Ishmael with those under the administration of these respective covenants. Revealing the geopolitical nature of the promises given to Abraham as the fulfillment of the promises will mean that eternal life will be offered to all Israel, and to all those who become as the children of Abraham, with the understanding that all those who become heirs like Isaac and heirs with Jesus will inherit all the lands promised to Abraham.

Presenting to us an intriguing biblical scenario that portends to significant geopolitical changes for all nations in the future, particularly for those nations and

peoples in the region of modern-day Palestine.  **(Continued in part two of this series.)**