

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 that was anciently known as Canaan? Will there ever be an end to the conflicts and political tensions in this region between the Israelis and the Arab world?

Israel's mandated presence in the Middle East, particularly in the region associated with ancient Canaan, was affirmed by the Apostle Paul who explained in an allegory that a new national covenant will someday be mediated by Jesus for the twelve tribes of Israel. Making it certain from the biblical perspective 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.

Prompting us then to review the nature and foreseeable consequences of the promises afforded to a man called Abraham.

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 ancient Canaan. Noting that 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 the nature of God's promise that Isaac's son Jacob and Jacob's descendants (Israel) would eventually become the designated recipients of a landed inheritance in the land of Canaan, which took root in a national sense a number of years after their journeys out of Egypt (Gen. 15:7; 28:13; Deut. 34:4).

Notably, when the time approached for the people of ancient Israel to inherit the land,

we see that God established a covenant with them at the mount in Sinai, and this covenant was grounded 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.

Yet, these same commandments were requisite to retaining the inheritance from one generation to another.

Consequently, 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. But it was not the commandments that actually stood in the way of the promises, as some Christians have come to believe, but rather it was the sin that the commandments revealed that jeopardized their inheritance in the land of Canaan. A situation that prompted the Apostle Paul to address how the nature of these commandments, and their covenantal appropriation at the mount in Sinai, were still not able to nullify the fulfillment of the promises even though the fault was revealed in the people by these commandments of God (I Chr. 28:2-3; 6-8; Jn. 8:39).

Thus, 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.]

Meaning that the peoples of Israel were given the land by reason of the promise made to Abraham, but the ability to possess and inherit the land generationally was made conditional on their obedience to the Ten Commandments and not the jurisprudence of Moses.

Simply, Paul is telling us that the first 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. And even though the people broke the covenant—as per the foundational stipulations—and were forced to eventually forfeit their inheritance in the land of Canaan, 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 a time following a 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 a future new covenant, which 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 immortal 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 those who are willing can be qualified by 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 will someday 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 (Gal. 3:29).

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 a potential heir to Abraham's estate, but not a firstborn heir according to the promise of a generational inheritance because the promise was also 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 an heir—he became the recipient of God's promise of a landed inheritance that would be centered in what is currently the modern-day region of pre-1948 Palestine. Which would in time come to include the sovereign lands of Syria, Lebanon, parts of Jordan and Egypt, and according to Scripture part of modern-day Turkey (Jos. 1:3-4).

Revealing to us something important about the nature and scope of the promises afforded to Abraham and the descendants of Isaac and also the children of Jacob.

That is the covenant by promise was inherently an exclusive covenant respective to the family of Abraham. And, according to the teachings of Jesus, these same promises

are intrinsically linked to the promise of immortal life in the kingdom of God.

Consequently, those who were not of the “seed” of Abraham through Isaac were outside the promise of a landed inheritance and also outside the promise of immortal life, except that 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 an immortal life in the kingdom of God are mutually inclusive in what was promised to Abraham. Meaning that the promise of the inheritance will have far-reaching geopolitical consequences for the Middle East and for the future of the world (Rom. 4:13). (Abraham did not inherit land in Canaan 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, and Isaac was born by reason of God’s intervention because Sarah was not able to bear children for Abraham.

However, even though Ishmael was indeed a “firstborn” son of Abraham, he still retained the status of a “bondservant” while in the household of Abraham, particularly 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 the mount in Sinai (represented by Hagar), and

the second covenant that will be [mediated by Jesus](#) at Jerusalem (represented by Sarah).

For Paul said that these two women—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 allegorically have a “freewoman,” the “Jerusalem” that is “above,” which is the “mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22).)

So, 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 the mount in Sinai. Then, relatively speaking, Paul associated the new national covenant and its administrative seat at Jerusalem with the freewoman who was Sarah—the mother of Isaac. A concept that posed a confounding problem for the Pharisees who could not accept the idea of a personal covenant with God through Jesus 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 a coming new national covenant that will be made with all Israel, but it is an individual-based covenant because it is established on a “calling” to follow Jesus.)

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

From an [historical perspective](#) we know that Hagar and Ismael were banished from the family of Abraham, which became a public acknowledgement demonstrating that Isaac would be the heir-apparent to the estate of Abraham. Noting 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 Canaan. Which conveys to us that the coming new national covenant is able to displace the first covenant established at the mount in Sinai, being allegorically understood from the fact that Sarah had the authority to “cast out” the bondwoman Hagar (Gen. 21:10-14). (As the matriarch, Sarah was in charge of the household of Abraham.)

Allowing Paul to conclude that those who have a personal covenant with God through Jesus now, and those who will someday come under a new national covenant in the future, are not now, and will not be, under the administration of the first covenant that was ratified at the mount in 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 its requirements in regard to that first covenant, including the token of circumcision and the sacrificial laws conducted by the priests of Israel (Heb. 10:1-4). And Paul also made it clear that if they chose the first covenant over a personal covenant with God through Jesus, they would be—respective to the inheritance of immortal life—likened to the bondservant Ishmael. Because the first covenant could not make them heirs to the promise of a coming kingdom of God and an everlasting inheritance in the family of Abraham.

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 in 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, which are the mutually inclusive promises of a landed inheritance and immortal 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 [gift of the spirit] in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ [by Christ’s baptism]. 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 the 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 picture that has significant consequences for us now, and for the future of the world—beginning at Jerusalem (Rom. 4:13-16; Gal. 4:28).

Therefore, 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 clearly to us the profound geopolitical nature of the promises given to Abraham, as the ultimate fulfillment of the promises will mean that immortal 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 that was promised to Abraham (Ezk. 37:1-14).

And this is where we discover an interesting geopolitical caveat to the promises given to Abraham.

For it is clear that God said to Abraham that he would be, “the father of many nations,” which gives us the expectation that it would start with his own family, and in this context we see that the Jewish people have—for the most part—preserved their collective identity with their tribal and familial origins, thereby defining their statehood with a specific region of the Middle East. In like manner, we should also expect that the other tribes of Israel would have done the same, but we have no record of these tribes creating such a national identity in this way, and therefore we ought to expect that the truth of their journeys and national developments would have become mixed with the myths and legends of national lore, and consequently they would not assume their national identities directly from their tribal and familial origins.

But as modern nation-states they ought to exist.

Because this is the expectation of the promises, and their looked-for realization based on the homogeneous nature of the

Commonwealth even in the time of the apostles, and therefore these tribes would have expectedly formed nation-states—as others did—and this would presumably be realized with the formal emergence of the “nation-state” concept that took root in the 17th century, beginning with the Peace of Westphalia.

Thus, with this mind, we can understand what it is that has led historians and theologians and students of the Bible to search for the so-called “lost [ten tribes](#) of Israel.”

Which brings us back again to the land of modern-day Israel.

Because here in this land is where the Jews have continued to identify with their tribal and familial origins, and so we can understand—in some respects—how they might come to perceive the establishment of the State of Israel as having relevance to the promises given to Abraham. Which brings us to think about how the many conflicts in the Middle East will somehow be resolved when we now see many Israelis embracing the geopolitical roots of the promises given to Abraham, which is often referenced in political rhetoric in confrontation with, and in opposition to, the mandates of the United Nations.  **(Continued in part two of this series.)** (andrewburdettewrites.com)