

## FAR-REACHING SCOPE OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

One of the pivotal doctrines in understanding the plan of God is the all-embracing oath-bound Covenant He made with Abraham over 4,000 years ago. Everything that God has done and will yet do for His intelligent creation is included in that Abrahamic Covenant. Under this one umbrella Covenant stand two additional Covenants: the *Law Covenant* of the Nation of Israel, and the *New Law Covenant* which will one day replace the old Law given to the Jews, and will extend from the Nation of Israel to the entire world of mankind. Understanding these three great Covenants — their functions, conditions and ultimate objectives — provides the answer to the critical question, “*What is truth?*”

### ABRAHAM GIVEN TWO DIFFICULT TESTS

God asked Abraham to carry out two difficult requests — testing his trust and faithfulness. These tests of trust were: 1) leave the land of your father’s house and go to a distant, unknown land where I will send you, and 2) sacrifice in death your beloved, firstborn son upon an altar to Me. (Genesis 12:1-5; 22:1-9) Abraham was not demanded to accept these challenges to his faith. He could have refused, but his faith was so strong in his God that he immediately complied. He trusted that God would not ask of him anything that would not serve the Divine purpose.

The first test of faith may not seem so difficult to some — logistically cumbersome, yes, and hard to leave behind ancestral roots. But, of the second test one may ask, why would God request such a horrible thing of Abraham as to slay his cherished son — the rightful heir of the Covenant? God used Abraham as a *type* — Abraham picturing God, and Isaac picturing God’s beloved, only begotten Son Jesus, sacrificed for us.

Abraham did not question the wisdom and love of God, and that is why his reward of faith was so great — so far-reaching. God’s promise to Abraham will extend to every man, woman and child who has ever lived! God’s oath-bound Covenant promised that Abraham’s *seed* would be as the *stars of heaven* and as the *sand upon the seashore*. What is even more incredible — God covenanted that this *heavenly* and *earthly seed* would one day *bless all of the families of the earth!* Did Abraham experience this day? No. Has anyone ever experienced the day when *all families of the earth* are blessed by Abraham’s earthly and heavenly seed? No, not yet!

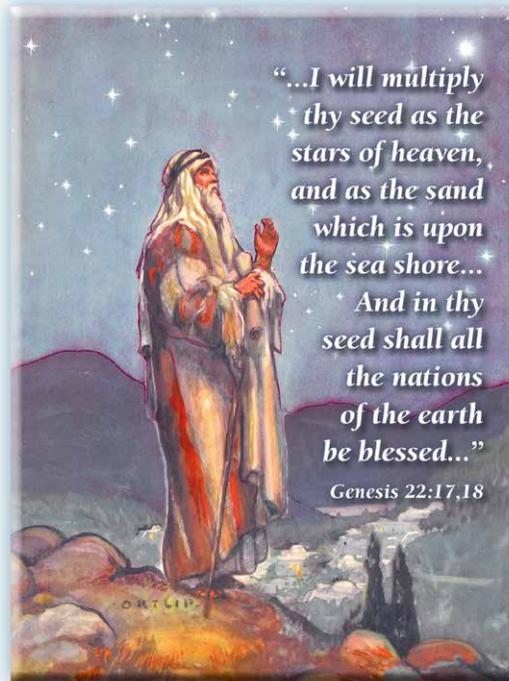
### ABRAHAM’S THREE WIVES PICTURE THREE GREAT COVENANTS

In Galatians 4:22-31 the Apostle Paul describes three great Covenants — two of which are expressly stated and one which is implied. These Covenants are shown in symbol by the three wives of Abraham. Sarah was the original wife of Abraham through whom the heir of the Covenant would come. She represents the original Covenant or promise made to Abraham. The *Hagar Covenant* is illustrated by Hagar — the maid-servant given to Abraham by Sarah as a *surrogate wife* to provide an heir. The *Keturah Covenant* is typified by Keturah who became Abraham’s third wife after Sarah died.

The promise God gave to Abraham is to be fulfilled through these three Covenants. “...Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid [Hagar], the other by a freewoman [Sarah]. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh [Ishmael]; but he of the freewoman was by promise [Isaac]. **Which things are an allegory:** for these are the two covenants; the one from the Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, [Sarah] thou barren that bearest

not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise... So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”

Under Divine inspiration, Paul spoke of the wives of Abraham as an *allegory* — a word picture using actual lives and events to represent great truths. Sarah pictured the Grace Covenant of the Christian — the Law of love and liberty in Christ. Sarah’s hand-maid Hagar pictured the Law Covenant of the Jews — under bondage to demanding rules and harsh penalties. By implication then, Abraham’s third wife Keturah would picture the New Law Covenant to Israel and through this nation to all the families of the earth — a New Covenant of hope, renewal and restoration. The Abrahamic Covenant, then, encompasses all three Covenants — these Covenants being uniquely different features of God’s arrangements by which the work of the over-arching Abrahamic Covenant is to be accomplished.



### HAGAR — THE COVENANT OF BONDAGE TO THE LAW

As we have seen in the Apostle's *allegory*, Sarah was barren — without a child. The promise of a *seed* was not as forthcoming as Sarah had hoped. When the promise was given, Sarah was quite old and beyond the years of child bearing. Sarah was concerned that she would not bring forth a child to fulfill God's oath-bound Covenant bestowed for her husband's faithfulness. Therefore, Sarah gave her hand-maid to Abraham that Hagar might be a surrogate wife to bring forth a son to Abraham. Sarah's intention to force the matter was good, but, had she waited, she would soon realize the miracle God would provide. Just as He had spoken, Sarah brought forth a son — the rightful *seed* and heir of the promise. Genesis 17:21

In Paul's allegory, Ishmael, the child born of the bondswoman, illustrates the Hebrew nation born under the Law Covenant. The Law Covenant, given through Moses at Mount Sinai, was one of strict, meticulous requirements. The Hebrews as a nation said, "*All that the LORD hath spoken we will do,*" and God took them at their word. (Exodus 19:8) This Law became their bondage and constrains them to this day, for as long as they claim relationship to Jehovah through the Law, they are obligated to the entire Law. (James 2:10) The requirements of this Law are impossible for imperfect humans to keep, and therefore it remains a bondage to those who remain its "*debtors.*" Galatians 5:3

As Ishmael was not the heir promised by God but was *added*, so too, Israel's Law Covenant was not a part of, nor did it replace, the original Covenant to Abraham — it was *added*. "*It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made...*" "*If there is no law, then there is nothing to disobey.*" (Galatians 3:19; Romans 4:15 ERV) Without the Law of Moses, the Hebrew people in particular would not be able to fully realize their undone condition and their need of a redeemer. Only a perfect man could keep the high, Divine standard of the Law Covenant.

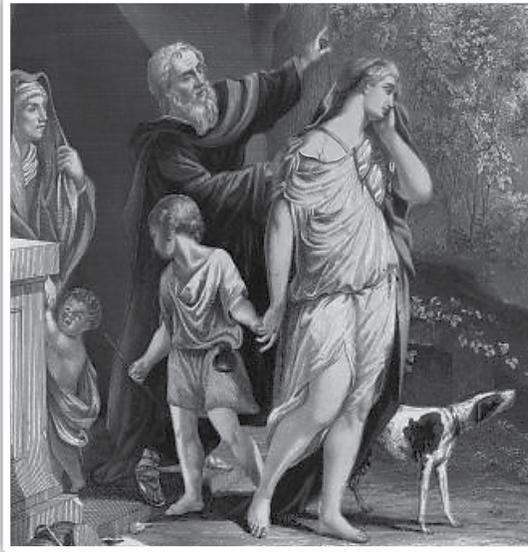
The Law (Hagar) Covenant, then, was to be a "*schoolmaster*" to bring the Jews to the point of accepting the sacrifice of the perfect man Jesus — in place of *the blood of bulls and goats*. "*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*" (Hebrews 10:4) This "*schoolmaster*" was designed to guide the Jews to their Messiah — the way to *justification through faith* in the true promised *seed*. Galatians 3:24-25

The Law Covenant served another very critical purpose. It would hold the body of Hebrews as a nation together to assure the lineage of the *seed* of Abraham "*until the seed should come.*" The Covenant God made with Abraham passed as a cherished inheritance from Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob and then to Jacob's twelve sons — the twelve tribes of Israel. From then on, the inheritance of the promise stayed with the Hebrew nation until the true *seed of promise* fulfilled his mission — his sacrifice in death.

As Ishmael persecuted Isaac, and he and his mother Hagar were cast off, almost perishing in the wilderness, so the Hebrew nation had been cast off from divine favor for eighteen centuries, and their hopes were nearly extinguished. (Genesis 21:8-21) As the angel of God pointed to the fountain of water, and Ishmael was

revived, so God's message is now pointing the Jews to a spring of water — their Zionistic hopes have revived! Thus, when Israel rejected their Messiah, that did not mean that the Jews were cast off forever. As Paul states: "*Hath God cast away his people? God forbid... I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery... blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.*" Romans 11:1, 25-27

Although many of the Hebrews neglected the *spirit* of their Law, this Covenant did develop a certain faithful class who, had they been alive at the time of Christ, would have quickly accepted him as their Messiah. These were considered righteous, not by the works of the Law, but by faith in the promises of God. Together, these faithful under the Law, and many others who lived before the Law, constitute worthy fathers of faith who are to be made "*princes in all the earth*" during the time when their Messiah rules as a righteous king. (Psalms 45:16) These *princes* will be Christ's fleshly representatives upon the earth when the world of mankind comes forth from their graves. These ancient, worthy fathers, having passed their test of faithfulness, will be rewarded with superior mental, moral and physical bodies. (Hebrews 11:1-40) They will reign as princes *and* teachers on earth with the same purpose as their spiritual king — that of bringing the world of mankind up to human perfection. When this task is done, these princes, together with Israel and the restored race of mankind, will comprise Abraham's earthly seed.



### SARAH — THE COVENANT OF LOVE, LIBERTY AND GRACE

Thus we see that when the Law Covenant was fulfilled by our Lord Jesus, it left the original Abrahamic Covenant just as it was before the Law Covenant was *added*. This Abrahamic Covenant began to be fulfilled when Sarah brought forth Isaac — Abraham's rightful heir. It was by God's *grace* that Sarah conceived a child — far beyond her years of childbearing. Correspondingly, the Abrahamic Covenant was to bring forth the *antitypical seed of promise* following a long delay. As in the allegory, the Abrahamic Covenant remained sure, and after a period of over 2,000 years from the giving of the promise, the Sarah feature of the Covenant began to be fulfilled by the man Christ Jesus.

As the Law Covenant, therefore, was represented by the bond-maid Hagar, and her son Ishmael represented the Nation of Israel, so it was when Messiah came at his first advent, he was represented in Sarah's son Isaac. Sarah, Abraham's first wife, represented that feature of the Abrahamic Covenant which pertained to the *spiritual seed* — *the stars of heaven* which would *bless all the families of the earth*. It is important to note that the Nation of Israel was never promised a spiritual nature. All of those who lived before the death of Christ were promised life on earth under the provision of the Abrahamic Covenant — these will be *as the sand upon the seashore*. Genesis 22:17, 18

This Sarah Covenant was a Covenant by grace — unmerited — "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves:*

*it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8-9) It is by faith in Christ that his followers receive *reckoned* perfection, making them acceptable to God. This Grace Covenant is only offered to those who are willing to become a part of Abraham’s *spiritual seed*. “*Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ... But before faith came, we were kept under the Law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed... For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ... And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.*” Galatians 3:16-29

Is everyone who names the name of Christ a part of Abraham’s *heavenly seed*? Note the qualifier in verse 27: “*For as many of you as have been **baptized** into Christ have put on Christ...*” What is it to be *baptized into Christ*? “*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? ...that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection...*” (Romans 6:3-5) Christ’s death was as a result of sacrifice. Therefore, if we are *Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise* we must also live a life of sacrifice with Christ. “*For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake...*” (Philippians 1:29) Jesus’ example was one of obedience to His Father’s will — no matter the cost, and, we, like our Master and example, give our lives fully to our Heavenly Father. “*For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps...*” 1 Peter 2:21

Thus, the Church of Christ — the *heavenly seed* — receives the inheritance of Abraham’s Covenant because they sacrifice with Christ. This is the Sarah Covenant by Grace, but also of sacrifice. (Psalm 50:5) The Church of Christ is offered this wonderful, unmerited gift of being joint-sacrificers with Christ that they might one day, as Abraham’s heavenly seed — the *stars of heaven* — *bless all families of the earth!* “*For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him...*” 2 Timothy 2:11, 12

Little did Sarah know that Hagar’s son Ishmael would taunt Isaac, the legitimate heir of Abraham’s Covenant. The allegory illustrates the fact that Jesus died at the hands of the Ishmael class — the Hebrews under the Law or Hagar Covenant. “*But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. 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.*” (Galatians 4:29, 30) Just as Sarah prompted Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away because of the persecuting attitude of Ishmael, so the Sarah (Grace) Covenant sent the Hagar (Law) Covenant away. And as Abraham did not leave Ishmael without a blessing, even so, God will not leave those born under the Law, the Hebrew people, without a blessing.

Those who are developed as a New Creation under the Sarah

Covenant have a special purpose — indeed, their suffering has a special purpose. Their faith manifests their loyalty to God and His truth under harsh circumstances — proving them worthy of *glory, honor and immortality*. (Romans 2:7; Revelation 2:10) These faithful do not receive the promised inheritance of the Abrahamic Covenant for themselves alone. No, they live to serve an unselfish, higher purpose. They, with Christ their head, have inherited the world of mankind. Christ and his body, the Church, are given the privilege of being sympathetic *priests and kings* to a *poor groaning creation*. (1 Peter 2:9; Titus 2:14) “*And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together... For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*” (Romans 8:17-23) Once the body of Christ is complete and the Christian Age is over, the invitation to this higher calling will close and give rise to the age of blessing which will extend to *all families of the earth*. This is that for which the poor groaning creation *waits*.



#### **KETURAH — THE NEW LAW COVENANT OF HOPE, RENEWAL AND RESTORATION**

The grand consummation of the far-reaching Covenant to Abraham is this final feature of God’s promise. After Sarah died, Abraham took another wife, Keturah. (Genesis 25:1-4) The name Keturah in Hebrew means *sweet* or *incense*. Through Keturah, Abraham was blessed with additional sons and daughters — *the sweet*

*incense* of his joy. By implication, after the Sarah Covenant is fulfilled by the completion of Christ and his Church, further blessings follow through the Keturah Covenant — *the sweet incense* of God’s joy.

The New (Keturah) Covenant will replace the old Law Covenant to the Jews. Moses said that one greater than himself — Christ along with his Church — will be the Mediator of this New Law Covenant which will provide hope and restitution through Israel to the world of mankind. (Deuteronomy 18:15-19) Thus, God’s Covenant to Abraham provides a heavenly and an earthly seed intended to bless the world of mankind. In due time, under the blessings of the New Law Covenant with Israel, all the families of the earth will become a part of the *sand upon the seashore*. These will learn and grow to perfection under the terms of the New Law Covenant arrangement.

Is it possible for anyone to number the grains of *sand upon the seashore*? Is it possible to number *the stars of heaven*? Only God knows the answer to these questions, but the significance of this picture is that those who will bless and be blessed is a number beyond our comprehension! Can we doubt the love of God when we see the far-reaching scope of His Plan? The Keturah Covenant — the hope of life restored — will be the opportunity for *all* to come into harmony with God through the promise once made long ago to Abraham. Abraham’s trust and faith in God in offering his cherished son upon the altar was the impetus for such a grand outcome of God’s mercies. The sacrifice of Christ, God’s cherished son is what brings about the fulfillment of every feature of God’s Covenants! Genesis 22:1-18

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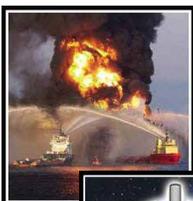
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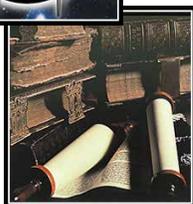
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