

Article of the Month

February, 2016

COVENANTS

Covenant is a word not common in our everyday language. But the concept is very common. A covenant is an agreement, a contract, or a promise. Sometimes in the Bible (or even in legal circles) it is also called a testament. In Scripture, there are many minor promises or covenants such as The Covenant of Salt, The Rainbow Covenant, The Marriage Covenant, etc.

In this month's article, however, we will examine the one great significant covenant which summarizes and incorporates all of God's plan for the human race. That covenant is called The Abrahamic Covenant. It is the covenant under which God, through the "seed of Abraham," will BLESS ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH.

– THE ORIGINAL COVENANT –

In Genesis 12 is the first record of the promise or covenant to Abraham. It was mostly a one-sided covenant in that God's only requirement for Abraham was that he leave his old home and go "to the land I will show you." But the promise that comes out of this is stupendously huge: (verse 3) "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Who could turn down an offer like that! Abraham complied. It had to occur to him that God was, in this promise, providing for the salvation of all mankind. The promise to Abraham was the gospel! (Galatians 3:8)

The promise was restated to Abraham's son, Isaac, and to his grandson, Jacob. These repetitions take on certain unique differences in their wording. It is not that the promise changed, but that the promise represented a plan and purpose so large and complex that its many details became clarified as time passed.

For instance, in Genesis 22:17, 18, God adds information for Abraham that it is not Abraham that would bless all of earth's families, but it would be Abraham's seed that would accomplish this. God divides Abraham's "seed" (or descendants) into two groups: (1) One part of his seed would be "as the stars of the heavens;" (2) the other part of his seed would be "as the sand which is on the seashore." This was a masterful way of foreshadowing that there ultimately will be TWO SALVATIONS – one to a heavenly resurrection, the other to an earthly resurrection.

We will soon see that the Apostle Paul confirms this application. But it was confirmed

Return to Article of the Month Index

earlier than Paul when Isaac and Jacob had the promise repeated to them. Isaac represented THE CHRIST — Jesus and his faithful disciples who receive a heavenly reward. Jacob represented the nation of Israel who receive an earthly reward. It is with this earthly seed of Abraham that a NEW COVENANT is to be made. (Jeremiah 31:31 - 34)

When Isaac receives the promise or covenant passed down to him (Genesis 26:4), it only mentions the “stars of heaven” part of the inheritance. This is because Isaac was a type or picture of the heavenly-salvation class. This is echoed in features of his experience. For instance (Genesis 24:60), when Isaac marries, it foreshadows Christ’s marriage to his “bride” — his faithful Church. Notice that the blessing on Rebekah is that she become the mother of thousands of millions! Jesus and his “bride” will, indeed, become the new parents of earth’s family of countless members of the human race.

Furthermore, when Rebekah did have children, they were twins — representing the two parts of Abraham’s “seed.” While the reality resulted in the nation of Israel and the tribes of Arabs, the picture (or type) represented the heavenly and earthly salvations coming out of the Abrahamic Covenant. In Genesis 25:23, it is long-term prophetically speaking of natural and spiritual Israel — the Jews, and the faithful disciples of Jesus.

The promise is finally repeated to Jacob in order to show that he represented the earthly resurrection. (Genesis 32:12) This repetition, however, omits reference to “stars.” It only mentions “sand of the sea” — representing the earthly salvation which will come through the NEW COVENANT to be made with Israel which Jacob pictured. (His name was changed to “Israel.”)

— ABRAHAM’S WIVES —

Paul points to the prophetically-allegorical meanings of features in the life of Abraham. In Galatians 4 he teaches us that Abraham’s wives were “an allegory” — a real-life picture of something much greater. Paul teaches that the wives of Abraham represented COVENANTS. Paul only mentions two of Abraham’s wives because in Paul’s day only two of the covenants were applicable. Abraham’s third wife (Keturah) was also a picture (Genesis 25:1). She represented the NEW COVENANT which was yet future from Paul’s day. He ignored this because his topic was about the change from Jewish to Christian ages, and Hagar and Sarah represented the covenants of these two ages. Keturah represented a then-distant age, the Millennial Age — not Paul’s topic.

It is important to note that there is one large “umbrella” covenant. That is the Abrahamic Covenant. But to fulfill the promise to Abraham, God would first deal with Israel in the Jewish Age under the Law Covenant represented by Hagar. Secondly, he would deal with true Christians under the Sarah (or Grace) Covenant during the Gospel

Return to Article of the Month Index

Age. Finally, he would deal with the whole world via Israel under the New Covenant (represented by Keturah). Thus these “three” covenants are all a part of the ONE GREAT COVENANT — the promise to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham’s “seed.” It is a BIG promise. It takes three ages (over 4,600 years!) and three corollary covenants to fulfill.

In Galatians 4, Paul details The Hagar (or Law) Covenant and The Sarah (or Grace) Covenant. He then, pointing to hopeful Christians says, “And you, brethren, like Isaac, are the children of promise.” Remember, it was the “seed” of Abraham that was to bless all the families of the earth. That was the promise. Paul shows that true Christians, the “body of Christ,” will be that “seed.” Thus, it is not the literal descendants of Abraham who will be the blesser seed; it is the faith descendants who will gain this privilege. (Romans 4:16, 11)

In Galatians 3:16 Paul clarifies this for us. Realizing that Abraham had TWO seeds in prophecy (the stars and the sands), Paul wants it understood that the heir of the promise was not both — not natural Israel and spiritual Israel (True Christians). The heir, THE seed which would gain the promise of the Covenant to be the blessers, is only those of the heavenly resurrection — the FAITHSEED of Abraham. He says, “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as referring to many, but rather to one — ‘And to your seed [singular] which is Christ’ [head and body].”

We would not wish to suggest that Abraham’s natural seed, the children of Israel, are not involved in the blessing process. Innumerable prophecies confirm that the Jews will be the earthly visible channel through which the blessings will flow. After all, the NEW COVENANT clearly is said to be made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. There will be no earthly blessings for Gentile peoples until they come into conformity with and gain coverage under that New Covenant. Thus, the nation of Israel will be a dispenser of blessings. (Isaiah 60:1-5, 9-11, 14) It is for this reason that they are once again gathered into the land which God promised them. The LAND was a part of the promise made to Abraham. Their presence there is an indication of how near we are to the beginning of the New Covenant.

— SUMMARY —

The “Gospel” is summed up in the promise (or covenant) to Abraham. His “seed” would be given the great privilege and power of blessing all the families of the earth by restoring them to health, life, and perfection. (Acts 3:19, 20)

Return to Article of the Month Index

This covenant is broken down into three parts which take three ages to accomplish. Each age is governed by a sub-covenant — each pictured by one of Abraham’s wives.

- (1) Hagar represented the Jewish Age under the Law Covenant. Its purpose was to prepare a people to be used later as recipients of a “New Covenant.” The Law Covenant also developed and identified Jesus as the first part of the “seed of promise.”
- (2) Sarah represented the Covenant by Sacrifice (Psalm 50:5) of the Gospel Age under which the “body of Christ” (the promised “seed of Abraham”) is developed. These will receive a heavenly resurrection giving them the powers they will need to “bless all the families of the earth.”
- (3) Finally, Keturah, Abraham’s third wife, represents the New Covenant which will thrive in the Peaceable Kingdom of the Millennial Age. All of willing mankind will come into harmony with this covenant as it expands from the Jewish people to ultimately cover the earth.

Thus will be fulfilled the greatest of all covenants as God spoke to Abraham.

