

Sweet Savor of the New Covenant

“In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” **HAD ADAM NOT BREACHED**

—Genesis 22:18 the condition of his covenant relationship with God by partaking of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil, he and all future generations could have enjoyed the wonderful privileges inherent in that covenant—sovereignty of the earth, direct communion with God, and everlasting life. Instead, Adam’s precious covenant relationship with God and all its privileges were terminated as Divine justice responded to Adam’s transgression. He, Eve, and their entire progeny were sentenced to death. Mankind yearns to return to the covenant relationship and privileges that Adam once possessed in Eden. However, sin and its consequences bar the way of return to that lost relationship.

In our featured text, God acknowledges mankind's yearning and expresses his intention to satisfy it. Israel's patriarch Abraham is promised that all mankind is to be saved from sin and its effects through his seed. God's reference to Abraham's seed is an expansion of an earlier promise where God said to Abraham, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:3) The reaffirmation of God's promise constitutes a Divine covenant with Abraham.

ALL TO BE BLESSED

The Apostle Paul provides the key to understanding the means by which God will accomplish his grand purpose through the seed of Abraham. He states that two of Abraham's wives symbolized two covenants related to the Abrahamic promise. "It is written, 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. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children."—Gal. 4:22-25

The apostle reveals that God's promise to Abraham will be fulfilled in the same number of covenants as Abraham had wives. Each covenant will bring forth its desired fruitage in the same manner that each of Abraham's wives brought forth the fruitage of their respective wombs. Only two were

mentioned by the apostle, but Abraham had three wives: Hagar (Gen.16:3), Sarah (Gen. 11:29) and Keturah (Gen.25:1). Paul invites the reader of his epistle to understand that the all-inclusive Abrahamic Covenant will be fulfilled in three subordinate covenants, each one symbolized by one of Abraham's wives. Of those three wives, Paul names only Hagar in Galatians 4 saying she, an Egyptian bondwoman of Abraham's household, symbolically represents the Law Covenant which was ratified at Mt. Sinai.

HAGAR

A marvelous prospect was placed before the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. If they remained obedient to the conditions of the covenant to which they had voluntarily agreed, they would become a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a people in permanent covenant relationship with God. The ratifying ceremony of that covenant is recounted in Exodus: "Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded

him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.” (Exod. 19:3-8) Inherent in the covenant agreement at Mt. Sinai was the prospect of everlasting life promised those who kept the Law of that covenant: “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD.”—Lev. 18:5

BOUND BY THE COVENANT

The covenant agreement to which Israel bound itself by ceremony was embodied in the Law. The Law was the full expression of the immutable principles of Divine justice. Those principles form the foundation upon which all aspects of God’s character rest. They demand perfect balance, perfect legal symmetry—full satisfaction at all times under all circumstances. Therefore, because the Israelites were imperfect, as are all men, the following caution was added to the wonderful prospect offered them at Mt. Sinai: “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.” (Deut 27:26) By saying ‘Amen’ the people unanimously signified that they both heard and understood.

A STANDARD RAISED

The Apostle Paul explains to his Galatian brethren that the Law, given at Mt. Sinai 430 years after the promise made to Abraham, was not a replacement for that promise but was the formal establishing in the earth of the Divine standard which that promise to Abraham had rendered necessary; a standard by which mankind’s inability to meet

God's righteous expectations could be measured until Christ would come who could meet those expectations. Paul says, "What I mean is that God made a covenant with Abraham and promised to keep it. The Law, which was given four hundred and thirty years later, cannot break that covenant and cancel God's promise. What, then, was the purpose of the Law? It was added in order to show what wrongdoing is, and it was meant to last until the coming of Abraham's descendant, to whom the promise was made."—Gal. 3:17,19, *Today's English Version*

THE STANDARD NOT MET

As God had foreseen, the Law was soon transgressed by Israel. The covenant agreement it had entered into became a curse. The perfect Law of God convicted the Israelites of their imperfection; emphasizing their inability to maintain the at-one-ment with God they had so recently attained through the covenant agreement ratified at Mt. Sinai. If the relationship of at-one-ment between God and Israel was to continue in any form and to any degree, it would have to be wrought through measures provided of God. Those came in the form of the Aaronic priesthood and the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement. By these, God rendered it possible for Israel to be annually reconciled to him afresh through the office of the high priest, Aaron, and the sacrifice of animals. For hundreds of years, Israel was bound to an annual cycle of condemnation and ritual atonement ceremonies, while never gaining more than a temporary relationship with God.

MERCY EXTENDED

As illustrated by the sacrificial types of the Aaronic priesthood, the curse that was incurred through transgressions of the Law had to be removed by the application of sacrificial blood. Permanent reconciliation was offered Israel through the sacrificial blood of Jesus. He died sacrificially in a very specific way on Israel's behalf. Christ suffered the penalty of the Law on Israel's behalf at Calvary. The apostle says, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written [Deut. 21:23], Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." (Gal. 3:13) As a consequence of Christ's act of mercy, the national curse Israel engendered for failing to keep the Law was cancelled. Hence, only that first condemnation which is common to both Jew and Gentile through Adam remains; a condemnation to be canceled for all through the ransom blood of Christ.

MERCY REJECTED

Rejecting God's mercy offered through his Son, Israel continued to seek the prize of the earthly covenant which it had unknowingly already lost. The prize—eternal life promised in the Law—had been won and claimed by the man, Jesus, who had kept the Law perfectly. It would be that very prize which he would lay down in sacrifice at Calvary on behalf of all mankind, Jew and Gentile. What had been an exclusive offer to the Jew was subsequently opened to the Gentile. Christ, himself, declared, "Therefore say I unto you [Israel], The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." (Matt. 21:43)

The transfer of the kingdom offer to the Gentiles is also declared to the Jews by the Apostle Paul: "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it."—Acts 28:28

LOST NATIONAL PROSPECT

In due time, Israel will come to know the full dimension of God's mercy expressed through Christ on its behalf, and will be profoundly moved. Foreseeing that time of gratitude, the Lord says, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." (Zech. 12:10) Though it continually convicted Israel of its national imperfections, the Law was the means by which that nation could be schooled in advance of the world regarding the principles of God. Though the people could not keep those Divine principles, they became familiar with them through types, shadows, and prophecy. "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."—Gal. 3:24,25

Had Israel heeded its 'schoolmaster' over the centuries of its instruction, it would have been prepared to embrace Christ Jesus as its Lord and Master at his First Advent. Its rejection of him cost Israel its wonderful national prospect. However, Israel's national loss under the Law does not disan-

nul the possibility of individual Jews attaining the kingdom. Beckoned to his home by Cornelius, a Gentile, the Apostle Peter declared, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."—Acts 10:34,35

The Apostle Paul, affirming Peter's declaration, explains, "He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." (Eph. 2:14-16) In the present Gospel Age, the individual Jew who is drawn by God (John 6:44), and who is willing to forego the bondage of the Law Covenant can, as do individually drawn Gentiles, enter the liberty of a different covenant by faith in Christ. That covenant of liberty is the covenant that Paul says is symbolized by Sarah; another of Abraham's three wives.

SARAH

Though she was not directly named as Hagar was, Sarah is the 'freewoman' to whom the Apostle Paul referred in Galatians 4:22-25. By that designation, he emphasizes that Sarah represents a covenant of liberty into which, if invited, both Jew and Gentile can enter during the Gospel Age. These, if faithful unto death will, with Christ Jesus, constitute the antitypical Isaac, the true seed of the Abrahamic promise. (Rev. 2:10) *(Continued on page 35)*

(Continued from page 31) Paul confirms that Abraham's true seed is a spiritual seed composed of the Lord Jesus and his disciples of the Gospel Age. "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. 3:28,29) Christ and his glorified disciples are to be the seed of promise—antitypical Isaac. Once the followers of Christ are glorified, the remainder of mankind will, in the Millennial Age, through that seed—the Mediator—enter into a New Covenant relationship with God, the relationship for which it has so long yearned.

KETURAH

Abraham's third wife, Keturah, represents that New Covenant. She was not directly referred to as an allegorical figure by the Apostle Paul as Hagar was, nor was she indirectly referred to as was Sarah. (Gal. 4: 22-26) Keturah is an allegorical figure by inference. Given the Apostle Paul's assurance that two covenants related to the Abrahamic Covenant were symbolized by the first two of Abraham's three wives, it is within reason to conclude that Abraham's third wife likewise symbolizes a third covenant—the New Covenant. From her very name, much can be ascertained about the nature and purpose of the future New Covenant. Keturah in the Hebrew language means 'incense' [*Strong's Bible Concordance* #6989].

Incense is symbolically related to the earnest prayers of the saints, the disciples of Christ. The Apostle John says: "Another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was

given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand." (Rev. 8:3,4) During the present Gospel Age, the prayers of the consecrated waft continually upward to heaven unto the golden throne of grace. Prayers of wonder, love and praise rise as a sweet odor to God from those who believe in him. They are the prayers of those who will constitute the spiritual body of the Christ—the Mediator of the New Covenant in the forthcoming Millennial Age.—Eph. 1:22,23

ACCOMPANIED BY INCENSE

For the entire 1000 years of the Millennial Age, the interposition of Christ and his church will be a necessity to mediate all communication between God and fallen mankind long contaminated by the effects of sin and death. "Now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant [a New Covenant], which was established upon better promises." (Heb. 8:6) "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they

shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:4,6

Without that interposition, the petitions and supplications of mankind would be viewed as impure offerings from unclean hands, heathen offerings entirely unacceptable to God. “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.” (Ps. 24:3,4) Thus, in the forthcoming Millennial Kingdom, mankind’s offerings to God will be through the Mediator of the New Covenant accompanied by the figurative incense of its collective prayers.

HEATHEN PRAISE INCREASES

In the course of the Millennial Age, thanksgiving and praise will increasingly ascend to God as the heathen progressively comprehend his majesty, grandeur and wisdom. Offerings of the heart will increase until they become universal in the earth. God himself declares it in the first chapter of Malachi: “From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.” (Mal. 1:11) This prophecy applies to the forthcoming Millennial Age at the beginning of which all mankind is characterized as Gentile or heathen.

PURPOSE OF MILLENNIAL AGE

Jew and Gentile at the beginning of the Millennial Age, will be Israelitish indeed at its conclusion.

Christ Jesus declared that a true Israelite was he who had no deviousness, no craftiness in his heart. "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (John 1:47) Though applied primarily to the Gospel Age, the Apostle Paul states what it means to be a true Israelite in any age. "He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." (Rom. 2:28,29) The purpose of the mediatorial reign of Christ is defined. Mankind's collective heathenish heart is to be changed to that of an 'Israelite indeed.' It is to be methodically returned to atonement with God and to a perfect ability to keep his commandments, the commandments of a New Covenant.

A SEASON OF TESTING

In a 'little season' that follows that Millennial Age, mankind's newly acquired Israelitish heart will be tested to prove that it has not only the ability but the desire to keep the commandments of God, a test that Adam failed though he was likewise perfect and at one with God. The season of testing is referred to by the revelator. "I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that

he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.”—Rev. 20:1-3

UNACCOMPANIED AFTER TESTING

Once it has proved to be no longer heathen at heart, the prayers of mankind will be received into the Divine realm unaccompanied. Returned at last to the longed-for covenant relationship with God and all its attendant privileges, Adam and his prog-eny, in boundless gratitude, will offer up unceasing praise, thanksgiving and adoration. The earnest prayers of the entire earth will then ascend con-tinually as a cloud to the throne of God, a universal hallelujah chorus, an eternal savor sweet as ‘Ke-turah’ and sweet as incense. ■