

# Children of Promise

***“I will certainly  
return unto thee  
according to the  
time of life; and, lo,  
Sarah thy wife  
shall have a son.”  
—Genesis 18:10***

**MANY YEARS AFTER**  
being called by God out of  
the land of Ur, Abraham was  
divinely commanded to go  
with his son Isaac to the land  
of Moriah. God said, “Take  
now thy son, thine only son

Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land  
of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering  
upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee  
of.”—Gen. 22:2

After arriving at Moriah, Abraham prepared to  
offer his beloved son in sacrifice as testimony to his  
great love for God. However, at the crucial moment,  
the hand of Abraham was stopped by an angel from  
sacrificing Isaac. (vss. 11,12) Speaking for God, the  
angel said, “By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD,  
for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not  
withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I  
will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply  
thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand  
which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall

possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”—vss. 16-18

## **NOT THROUGH THE LAW**

Later, the Israelites came to understand their unique national status under the Law Covenant instituted by God through Moses at Mount Sinai. It was confirmed that they were the promised seed and, as Abraham’s natural descendants, were the sole inheritors of all that was promised him by God. (Exod. 6:2-8) However, the Apostle Paul explains, “The promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.”—Rom. 4:13-16

## **THE PROMISED SEED**

In the foregoing verses, Paul points out that the foundation of God’s promises of a seed do not rest on the Law of Moses but by the faith of Abraham. The apostle further teaches, “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise

are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac.”—Rom. 9:6-10

The promised seed that will bless all the families of the earth is not natural Isaac, for he serves only as a picture of a greater spiritual Isaac. The true seed—spiritual Isaac—will consist of both Jew and Gentile. During this present Gospel Age, this spiritual seed is begotten in a new and special manner, like unto that by which natural Isaac was begotten through a specific promise of God.

## **PROMISE AT MAMRE**

The promise to Abraham was given in Mamre and is recorded for us: “The LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground.” Continuing, one of the men said, “Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.” “And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac.”—Gen. 18:1,2,9-11; 17:19

Paul proclaims that the miracle and the promise relative to Isaac’s birth thus invalidate the

Israelites' claim of an exclusive right to the promised seed of Abraham. Neither the promise to Abraham and Sarah, nor the child she subsequently delivered, were the products of the Law, but were products of their faith in the power of God. In his epistle to the Hebrew brethren, the apostle emphasizes that Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac signified that the salvation of all mankind is to be accomplished through the vital element of faith alone. He said, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised."—Heb. 11:8-11

## **CONSIDER THE PROMISE**

As he preached the pure message of faith, Paul was vigorously opposed by Christian converts from Judaism who taught obedience to both Christ and the Law of Moses. Countering this, the apostle alludes to the promise and the miracle that pertains to Sarah and the birth of Isaac, and asks, "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For 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.”—Gal. 4:21-23

Paul then reveals the symbolic significance of Abraham’s wives. “This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written, Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; for more numerous are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband.”—vss. 24-27, *New American Standard Bible*

## **TWO COVENANTS**

By naming Hagar, a bondwoman, and alluding to Sarah, a free woman, Paul refers to two of Abraham’s wives. These are figures, or symbols, of two covenants. One covenant enslaves through the flesh and is characterized by literal Jerusalem. The other covenant liberates through the spirit and is characterized by spiritual Jerusalem. Paul says Hagar represents the Law Covenant which binds those under it to ordinances they are incapable of keeping. Sarah, on the other hand, represents a covenant of liberation wherein all under it are free from the demands of those ordinances. The apostle purposely avoids mention of Keturah, Abraham’s third wife. (Gen. 25:1,2) Although a third covenant may be implied by Keturah, it would have broadened the focus of Paul’s subject beyond the two points he is making. First, the Law Covenant

represents Israel's bondage to a standard which kept those under it perpetually condemned. Second, there is another covenant which, during the present Gospel Age, represents the prospect of liberty through Christ from all condemnation.

## **THE SARAH COVENANT**

Paul declared that the covenant pictured by faithful Sarah "is our mother." Therefore, the covenant from which the promised seed will be brought forth can be properly designated the Sarah Covenant, or as it is sometimes stated, the Sarah feature of the Abrahamic Covenant. Since Pentecost, prospective members of the promised seed class are begotten by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul identifies this spiritual Isaac class, the seed of promise, as consisting of Christ and all those who "belong to" him during the present age. "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, And to seeds, as referring to many, but rather to one, And to your seed, that is, Christ. ... For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ, ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." —Gal. 3:16,27-29, *NASB*

Those followers of Christ who remain faithful will, with him, constitute the true promised seed—the greater Isaac—which will bless "all the kindreds of the earth." (Acts 3:25) These faithful ones are the saints of God. They are begotten, nurtured, and brought to completion within the figurative womb of the Sarah Covenant, which is also described as a covenant of sacrifice. *(Continued on page 36)*

*(Continued from page 31)* “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”—Ps. 50:5

The apostle reminded the Judaizers that the Sarah Covenant of sacrifice had centuries before been pictorially foretold, and although long barren, it would in time bear greater fruitage than the Law Covenant to which the Jews were so zealously and erroneously devoted. Addressing those begotten of the Holy Spirit of God, the apostle directly states his point, saying, “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.” (Gal. 4:28) Thus, Paul does not refer to the promise given in the land of Moriah—Genesis 22—that pertains to Abraham, but to the promise given in the land of Mamre—Genesis 18—that pertains to Sarah giving birth to Isaac, a child of promise.

## **BONDWOMAN CAST OUT**

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul continues to counter the teaching of the Judaizers. He speaks of the history of conflict within Abraham’s very household wherein the child of the flesh, Ishmael, persecuted the younger child, Isaac, who had been begotten by the power of God. This resulted in the casting out of the fleshly child and his mother Hagar. The apostle says, “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. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”—Gal. 4:29-31; Gen. 21:9,10

## A SPECIAL CREATION

Isaac was begotten and born under extraordinary circumstances. He was a special creation of God's power upon Sarah's womb. Paul makes it clear that it is to be likewise with spiritual Isaac. This spiritual class of both Jews and Gentiles, with Christ Jesus as its head, is begotten by the power of God. (Gal. 3:28) A distinctly "new creation" is nurtured and developed within the protective womb of the Sarah Covenant. (II Cor. 5:17, *English Standard Version*) Brought forth in the first resurrection, first the head our Lord Jesus, and then his faithful "body" members, the completed spiritual seed will bless all mankind during Christ's Messianic kingdom reign. (I Cor. 12:12,27; Col. 1:18; Rev. 20:6) Paul states the matter thus, that God has "put all things under his [Jesus'] feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."—Eph. 1:22,23

## THE CHRIST

The greater Isaac class is to be a collective, spiritual seed composed not only of Jews but those from all nations who have the faith of Abraham. These spirit-begotten brethren in Christ are the promised fruit of a symbolic womb—the Sarah Covenant of liberty. It will be within this figurative womb that the Christ, head and body, will be brought forth to bless all the families of the earth with a "New Covenant." (Jer. 31:31-34) This may be well represented by Abraham's third wife Keturah, pointing to a covenant to be mediated among all mankind during the thousand years of the Messianic kingdom.—Heb. 12:24



The “umbrella” Abrahamic Covenant holds forth the promise of blessing all the nations of the earth by that spiritual seed once it is brought forth from the Sarah Covenant feature. Everything that pertained to Isaac as the child of promise was contingent upon Sarah’s belief that it was possible for God to do that which he had promised. Likewise, greater Isaac—the Christ head and body—begotten and conceived during the present Christian age, will be delivered through faith to the everlasting benefit of all.—Eph. 2:6-9; I John 5:4

“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. 20:6) “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.”—Heb. 8:10,11 ■