

Calvary at Sinai

Have you ever wondered how the Arab-Israeli conflict got started? Why does all that intense hatred exist in the Middle East? Well in more recent years it goes back to the Zionist movement which coalesced the Jews who had been scattered in many nations over the course of centuries. They were badly persecuted. So they decided to take their ancient home which in the meantime had become the land of the Arab-Palestinians. The Zionist-political movement displaced the Palestinians.

In modern times Yassar Arafat has been the *de facto* Palestinian leader for years. He led the covert war of terrorism within the Israeli State. The struggle is over the land. But this decades-old war goes way back before the twentieth century.

It goes back to some decisions that Abraham and Sarah made in the Old Testament. God made seven fantastic promises to Abraham which we read of in the book of Genesis: "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and 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. 12:2, 3. This was God's everlasting covenant given to Abraham.

Did God ask Abraham to make any promise in return to Him? No. God is the only one whose Word is spoken without guile. His Word is the evidence of the reality of the promise.

Man is sinful. "All have sinned and come short of the glory [character] of God." Rom. 5:12. In and of ourselves our word means nothing. All our promises are like ropes of sand. Therefore when God enters covenant with humans He makes the promises and gives them to us.

Just what was the blessing of Abraham? God said, "I will bless thee." Gen. 12:2. Then, evidently, God is the blessing of Abraham. Indeed, God said, "Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Gen. 15:1.

God is the Creator. To have God is to have His life. God is the smartest Person in the universe. So you have wisdom, understanding, and skillfulness.

But more than this, to have God you have His character, His glory, which is the righteousness of God. And this is just the blessing that poor sinners need. Can there be any greater blessing for us poor sinners than to know we have our sins forgiven and washed away?

This is just the blessing that came upon Abraham. “And he [Abraham] believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” Gen. 15:6.

Abraham believed God’s covenant promise given to him and he was justified by faith. God does not condemn. He forgives the godless sinner. That’s what Abraham was when he came out of Ur of the Chaldees—the heathen.

God made a further promise to Abraham after he had cut the ties with all his family and relatives. “And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.” Gen. 13:14, 15. Now the Lord was not just promising to give Abraham the small little country there in the Middle East that we know as Israel. No, that falls far too short of what God had in mind and what Abraham understood was being promised to him.

“For 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.” Rom. 4:13. God’s promise involved the inheritance of the whole world in righteousness. That means this old sinful world wasn’t involved in the promise at all. There is nothing righteousness about this old world whose creation is groaning under the strains of sin. God’s promise is of a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteous for ever and ever.

So why are the Palestinians and Israelis fighting over a small piece of the earth in such violent ways when God’s promise to them involves nothing of the kind?

Let us see. A little further on in Genesis we read that God promised to give a child to Abraham. “And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed. . . the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, . . . he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.” Gen. 15:3, 4.

When many years had passed without God's promise being fulfilled, Sarah approached Abraham about taking things into their own hands. She proposed that he sleep with her Egyptian handmaid Hagar. "Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai." Gen. 16:2.

When it was a choice between God's voice and his wife's voice, Abraham should have listened to God's voice. It was just here that he demonstrated unbelief in God's promise. In other words, they said we believe what God has said, but we need to add to it our own works. And that is the old covenant. Faith plus our works equals the old covenant.

The apostle Paul explains the connection of Hagar with the old covenant. "But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh. . . . Which things are an allegory; for these are the two covenants; . . . which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar." Gal. 4:23, 24. That son "born after the flesh" was Ishmael.

Abraham loved Ishmael very much, but he could never be the child of promise given by God because of the circumstances of his birth. But God did promise to bless Ishmael. "And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." Gen. 17:20. Ishmael became the father of the large family that we know as the Arabs.

God revealed to Abraham that His covenant promise would be given to Isaac the son of the freewoman Sarah. "And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." Gen. 17:19. Isaac was the promised seed through whom Jacob was born.

Jacob was later given the name Israel [one who prevails with God]. The twelve sons of Jacob were the forefathers of the tribes that made up the nation of Israel. This is the origin of the Arabs and Israelis. They arose out of the old covenant and new covenant experience of Abraham.

When Sarah was way beyond child-bearing years and it was humanly impossible for her to conceive, God gave her the child He had promised.

“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. 11:11. This child of the freewoman was the new covenant fulfilled.

“He of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory; for these are the two covenants.” Gal. 3:23, 24. “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.” Gal. 3:28. We see here that by definition from the Bible, God’s covenant is His promise. It is God’s one-sided promise which is His gift to man. Man receives the promise by faith alone.

“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. And this I say, that the *covenant*, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the *promise* of none effect.” Gal. 3:16, 17. Here the covenant is defined as the promise.

God made the promise to Abraham and his seed who is Christ. God’s covenant is in Christ. “For all the promises of God in Him [i.e., Christ] are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.” 2 Cor. 1:20.

Could a bondman like Ishmael become a child of the promise? Could a heathen be included in the promised inheritance of the new earth? Are Gentiles necessarily excluded from the promises of God because they were not born ethnically Jewish?

Evidently not. God’s loves the whole world. Christ died for the sins of the whole world. He is the Saviour of the world. 1 Tim. 4:10. “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Gal. 3:29.

God has called and elected every last man, woman and child of lost Adam to be saved in Christ and receive the inheritance. So any Arab could be included based on those conditions.

It is heart-rending to see the suicide bombers take their own lives while blasting away so many innocent Jewish lives. These Palestinians believe that

when they die in such a “holy war” declared by Allah that they will go immediately to him and receive great reward.

A few years ago when President Clinton was in office, Arafat was offered practically 90% of what the Palestinians wanted—the West bank, a portion of Jerusalem as their capital, and the Gaza strip. But he turned it down because the leadership of the Palestinians wanted nothing less than the eradication of the state of Israel. The leadership wanted all of the land. Israel refuses this kind of future for its people. It is fighting a war of terrorism for survival as a state.

Is this what God intended for the literal descendants of Abraham? Both sides believe that God promised them the land. If they could just hear the message of the Bible they would realize that God’s promise of land was not to the physical descendants of Abraham.

God’s promise was to the seed of Abraham who is Christ. And hence all who are Christ’s become joint heirs with Him. God’s promise is not about Ishmael,—the Palestinians,—nor the Israelis, neither of whom want anything to do with Christ.

However, God’s promise is all in Christ. Belief in Christ is the only sure way of gaining the inheritance of the whole earth both for the Palestinian and the Israeli. The Arab-Israeli conflict will never be resolved. It will continue until Jesus comes the second time and His holy war will end the terrorism. All this fighting comes as a result of the old covenant. Men are seeking to grab what they believe has been promised to their people.

The old covenant is a covenant of works and it always leads to bondage in sin and death. The new covenant is God’s promise which we receive by faith as His gift to us. So then we can readily see that the old and new covenants as an experience run on two parallel tracks down through the corridors of time in earth’s history. They are two experiences.

At one time Abraham experienced the new covenant by faith. When he listened to Sarah he experienced the old covenant of works. This has powerful implications for how we view the covenants with respect to the cross.

The commonly perceived paradigm of the two covenants is that the old covenant existed before the cross, but that when Jesus died He did away with that and instituted the new covenant which followed after the cross.

The argument that follows from this is that since the law of God was part of the old covenant, it was done away with when Jesus died on the cross. Now since we live post-Calvary we have nothing to do with the ten commandments for surely we live under grace not law.

But if the two covenants are two experiences, then the sequential view of the two covenants holds no water.

Dispensational Covenant Model

Old	Covenant	†	New	Covenant
Old Dispensation			New Dispensation	
Ten Commandments			No Law	

Scriptural Model of the Two Covenants



We can see this again in another illustration from the Old Testament. Long after Abraham had gone to his grave his grandchildren found themselves under Egyptian bondage. After some 430 years God remembered His covenant and delivered them from slavery. In so doing He taught them many valuable lessons of his providential care.

Israel even understood the cross of Christ. They had observed Passover before departing from Egypt. The death angel had seen the blood of the Lamb on their doorposts and had passed over their homes. Whereas the angel struck down the firstborn of both Egyptians and Israelites who failed to believe in the blood of their Substitute and Surety. The cross of Christ saved them from certain death.

Then Yahweh provided bread for them in the wilderness. This bread was sufficient for the day by day needs of the people to sustain life. And Christ was represented by that bread. They partook daily from the Lord's table.

And, most significantly, when Moses struck the rock, which was Horeb (another name for Mount Sinai), water came forth. The apostle Paul provided the spiritual application of that historical life-saving experience. "And did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ." 1 Cor. 10:4. Christ was portrayed before them as crucified at Mount Sinai. What issued forth was life to them from the cross.

And so God reminded Israel: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." Exodus 19:4. Israel had all this evidence and so much more that their deliverance and providential guidance was miraculously provided by the cross of Christ.

So that when God proposed marriage to them by promising His covenant they should have responded gratefully as did their father Abraham by faith. God proposed His same gracious promise to Israel which He had given to Abraham. "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." Ex. 19:5.

This verse has been mistranslated by someone who saw it through old covenant eyes. It doesn't sound like God's promise to Israel at all. Rather it sounds like what they must "obey" and "keep."

However, the Hebrew *shamar* means to "listen." So God is asking them to listen to His voice. The other Hebrew word which clarifies this sentence is *shamea* which means to "cherish" or "treasure." And so, God is asking Israel to pay attention, listen to His voice as He speaks to them His word of promise. God calls upon them to "cherish My covenant." Receive it into the mind and heart. God's covenant is the power of the gospel. Christ changes the mind.

But Israel did not get it. Even though God taught them about the cross of Christ through the Passover and the water from Sinai, they refused to have their

“self” crucified with Christ. They were motivated by self-sufficiency. “And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” Ex. 19:8. And that was the old covenant.

When God spoke His ten commandments from Mount Sinai it was with awesome grandeur. The place was smoking like a volcano. There was lightning and thunder. Anyone crossing the boundary to the mountain was struck dead. This was to impress upon these sinners the greatness of the gospel of Christ which they in their self-righteousness had rejected. They might have had all of God’s commandments in their heart as did Abraham if they had believed God’s promise.

And so, the law struck terror in the sinner’s heart. It locked them up in their sins and unbelief. But the law could not deliver them. The law cannot give life. Neither can the sinner obey the law because he has not in him the ability to do so. There is no righteousness in the sinner nor in the law. The law is the mere statement of the straight and true pathway in which to walk.

That Israel experienced the old covenant at Sinai is confirmed by Paul. “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.” Gal. 4:24, 25. Israel by rejecting Christ by faith at Sinai chose the way of self-improvement. The problem was not with a defective law.

That which God speaks and writes with His own finger on tables of stone cannot be bad. That is His Word. The problem at Sinai was the self-righteous, confidence of the people who said, “All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do.” That was the old covenant.

The law “was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.” Gal. 3:19, 20. The deliverer is the Mediator. Who is the Mediator? “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” 1 Tim. 2:5. The law came “in the hand of a Mediator.” Thank God for that! Without a Mediator, the law is nothing but a curse, sin, condemnation and death. But God’s law “in the hand of a

Mediator” is freedom. In Jesus all of God’s ten commandments are ten promises. In Jesus God’s commandments are the perfect law of liberty.

So the law locks us up in our sin. The only door to freedom is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Mediator between two parties—God being one, and the sinner is the other. In an unresolved dispute where two parties are deadlocked, they bring in a Mediator to help resolve the conflict.

Jesus mediates the resolution to our sin problem with God. As God’s Mediator Jesus is 100% God. He Himself gave the law. So there is no way that He is going to fudge the books and manipulate the legal basis for the atonement.

But Jesus is the perfect Mediator because He took our sinful human flesh. God made Him to be sin for us. 2 Cor. 5:21. He subjected Himself to death, even the death of the cross. Therefore He is a sympathetic High Priest. He knows what we are going through with the sin problem.

Anyone who is left with the impression that the law was abolished by Christ’s death upon the cross has misunderstood the apostle Paul. Paul disabused his readers of that thought when he said: “Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.” Gal. 3:21. The law isn’t contrary God’s promises. It is in God’s promises. And all of God’s promises are “yes” in Christ. But the law outside of God’s promise in Christ cannot give life. It can only curse the sinner and consign them to death.

It was never God’s original intent to write the law on tables of stone. He wants to write them by the power of Christ on our hearts. Then we have the righteousness of the law. But outside of Christ the law by our own power cannot bring righteousness. Here we see that righteousness and life are one in Christ.

The new covenant doesn’t do away with the law of God. God’s promise does that which neither the sinner nor the law can do. “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” Heb. 10:17. God’s covenant, which is the gospel, brings us

into harmony with God's law. The gospel is the law in Christ written upon our hearts by His Holy Spirit.

Are you weary of all the war and violence and endless strife in the world today? Are you tired of the sinfulness of your own life, and your inability to make your life good? Have your promises more often than not been broken? What has become of all your resolutions to do right? Can you by reform make yourself good enough and safe enough to save? Isn't it time that you lose all faith in self and believe God's promise in Christ for salvation?

God has promised to save you in Christ. He will never go back on what He has said. Have faith in God.