

by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children (Galatians 4:21-25).

We must recognize that this is still true of the present city of Jerusalem: all who are born in it are born into slavery, not sonship.

But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written:

“Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.”

Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.” Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman (Galatians 4:26-31).

That Scripture refutes any idea that there is another way into the presence of God other than by miracle birth. The slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance. People from

ethnic Israel will never share in the church's inheritance. That does not mean that there is no hope for Israel, for "*the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*" (Titus 2:11), and Paul's "*heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites [was] that they may be saved*" (Rom. 10:1). As the Kingdom increases in dimension and power, we must expect increasing numbers of Jews to be born again.

Who is this woman in the heavens, then? She is the Jerusalem that is from above, of which Paul speaks here; she is our mother. You and I have been born as part of the fulfillment of a promise. It is the promise that God made to Abraham, that through his seed all the earth would be blessed. But there is a greater promise even than that. It is a promise that God made to His Son. When Jesus went back into the presence of God and sat down at His right hand, the Father turned to Him and said, "*Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your inheritance, the ends of the earth Your possession*" (Ps. 2:8).

God promised the world to Jesus, and you and I are the first fruits. You and I are the first demonstration that what God promised to Jesus is being fulfilled. We have come to birth. We have been born from above. When Jesus says to Nicodemus, "*You must be born again,*" that can legitimately be interpreted, "*You must be born from above.*" You and I were born from above. You and I have our origins in Heaven. I do not mean we were preexistent souls before our bodies came into being, but rather that our names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the world was created. You and I were born in Zion. God said He is going to write a list of those who were born in Zion (see Ps. 87:6), and you and I were born there. This heavenly woman is the Jerusalem that is from above.

When you realize who your mother is, you understand who you are. Israel was under pressure and in defeat. She was overcome by her enemies until Deborah arose as a mother in Israel. And as she arose, so her children found their strength, recovered their vitality, discovered their faith, moved on in power, and routed the enemy. It's good to know who your mother is.

The Covenant and the Offspring

We have been born from above, and this is not some kind of new departure. This has always been the purpose of God, right from the beginning, right from the Garden of Eden. God wanted the world filled with his offspring. Earlier I mentioned the last word that Malachi spoke, but, praise God, he said other things, some of them blessing and some of them rebuke. One of the things that he rebuked his generation for was their forsaking of the covenant. When Paul used the picture of Sarah and Hagar, he said that they are two covenants. So, the women represent covenants. They also represent mountains, and they represent the sons they brought forth. There is this kind of contrast all the way through the Scriptures: of cities, sons, women, and mountains. But one of the confrontations that Malachi brings to his generation is that they have forsaken the covenant. He tells them that they forsook the covenant with Levi. The covenant with Levi is the covenant with Moses, who was of the tribe of Levi, and it had to do with religious observance and legal requirements. Malachi admonishes them:

“And you will know that I have sent you this admonition so that My covenant with Levi may continue,” says the

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Lord Almighty. "My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered Me and stood in awe of My name. True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin. "For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction—because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty. But you have turned from the way (Malachi 2:4-8).

He said, "I made a covenant with you. It was a covenant of life and a covenant of peace, but you turned from the way. You have broken the covenant." And when you break the covenant with God, everything begins to crumble. The domino effect sets in, and trouble arises. So he confronts them, not only with their breaking of covenant with God, but with their breaking of covenant with one another:

*Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?
Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another? (Malachi 2:10)*

Once you have broken covenant with God, it is an easy step to break covenant with your brother. So society has come under pressure. When our relationship with God breaks down, society begins to unravel. We see it in our own nation and in the world. Although there was not an awareness of covenant, there was once an awareness of godliness, of responsibility, an awareness that there was one who sat as judge. There was, at least, an acknowledgment of a God over the earth, but when that was eroded, society began to collapse. This breakdown was inevitable because God has made covenant the building block

of our society. Society begins with our relationship with Him. When that has broken down, our relationship with one another breaks down.

Malachi continues:

Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, "Why?" It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant (Malachi 2:13-14).

When we break covenant with God, and with one another, it is easy for marriage to start to collapse. You can trace that in the social history of our own nation and many others. So God says, "I am the God of covenant, and I want to bring you into covenant. I want you to be in covenant with me. I want you to be in covenant with one another. I want you to be in covenant with the wife of your youth." And why is God looking for that and demanding it? What motivates him to place so much importance on it? The answer is in the very next verse:

Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring (Malachi 2:15).

God has always been looking for godly offspring. He has been looking for his bride to bring forth his sons. The tragedy of Israel, of old covenant Israel, is that because they broke covenant, they were unable to do that. They failed to do what God wanted them to do. Consider how Isaiah describes it:

As a woman with child and about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pain, so were we in Your presence, O Lord. We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth to people of the world (Isaiah 26:17-18).

What a tragic confession! What a dreadful anticlimax, to go through all the agonies of a phantom pregnancy, to go through the travail of one who is going to give birth and to produce nothing but wind! That is the history of Israel. God was looking for godly offspring, but no children were born. God was looking not only for a multitude of godly offspring, but for a specific offspring. The Bible takes two great Old Testament expectations and changes them radically in the hands of Paul. He promised Abraham two things: land and children. But, in Romans, Paul tells us that God actually promised Abraham and his offspring that they would be heirs to the world, not to a small piece of land in the Middle East (see Rom. 4:13). Then, in Galatians, Paul is talking about Abraham's seed and remarks, "*The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ*" (Gal. 3:16).

So Paul takes the promise which had geographical limitation, takes the limitations off it, and says, "God wants to give you the world." Then he takes the broad and general interpretation about seed or offspring and specifies it and restricts it to one. That one is Christ. The promises of Abraham, then, are not for Palestine but for the world. We do not have to get into the debate over whose land it is, whether it belongs to the

Palestinians or to the Jews. It belongs to God, and, ultimately, because it belongs to God, it belongs to us. And the seed is not many but one, Christ.

A Savior Is Born

The promise about the offspring, then, is not fulfilled in ethnic Israel. It is fulfilled in Jesus, and we see from this dramatic picture in the Book of Revelation that it is Jesus who is being brought forth, for He is snatched up to the throne, where He rules the nations with an iron rod. He is the ultimate overcomer, and He will bring God's Kingdom to the nations. This was the expectation in the prophets. Although they knew Israel had failed, many of them believed that God would do what He said He would do, that God's plan would ultimately be fulfilled, and that His purpose would prosper. And so we hear from the prophet Micah,

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of His brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they will live securely, for then His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And He will be their peace. When the Assyrian invades our land and marches through our fortresses, we will raise against him seven shepherds, even eight leaders of men (Micah 5:2-5).

There is a birth coming. They knew it. They expected it. When the men from the East came inquiring where the Christ was to be born, Herod's advisers used this Scripture to prove that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem. Here was this great expectation: that she who was in travail would bring forth a son. You see, God's will and purpose was always for sons, but most specifically it was for His Son to be born into the world. And what we are seeing here is a reenactment of all those women who gave birth to deliverers down through the ages until ultimately Jesus Himself comes, the magnificent Deliverer, the mighty Savior. He has now come to bring deliverance. The serpent is there. The dragon is there, waiting to devour Him, just as he stood to devour Moses. Here he is seeking to snatch the child, but God snatches Him instead! This picture tells us nothing of Jesus' ministry, of His miracles, or of His death. He goes from birth to resurrection in an instant, in order that it might be understood that God's ultimate purpose is for Him to rule all the nations.

Isaiah had said to a king under pressure and in despair because of invading armies, "*Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights*" (Isa. 7:11). The king did not ask, but God gave it anyway. In this twelfth chapter of Revelation we see this sign: a sign in the heavens. And the sign was of a woman giving birth: "*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel*" (Isa. 7:14).

You see, although Jesus is eternal, Jesus has an earthly history. We do, too. We have a heavenly history because our names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the world was ever made. But we also have an earthly history. We are in the

church because God wrote our names and He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (see Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8). But there was also a moment in history when we heard and responded to the Gospel. Jesus is the same. He has a heavenly history because He is the eternal God. But He has an earthly history because there was a time when He was born into the world. What we are seeing is the heavenly and earthly coming together in the purposes of God.

This tells us that the whole point of His birth was that He would rule the nations with an iron scepter. That is a fulfillment of many Old Testament Scriptures. First of all, Genesis tells us that "*The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his*" (Gen. 49:10). The psalmist tells us that God says, "*I will make the nations Your inheritance, the ends of the earth Your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter*" (Ps. 2:8-9). But the interesting thing is that that is the exact promise that Jesus made to the church at Thyatira. We also, who are born from above, are caught up to the throne, as He promised the Laodiceans, and rule the nations with an iron scepter, as He promised the Thyatirans. We also are born and ascend and sit on the throne.

We are included in another sense, too. We are not only the child that is born but the mother that brings forth the child. It is a bit confusing, but it does also say of Jesus that He was both the Root and the Offspring of David. He is the Root of David because David was chosen in God's eternal will; but Jesus, in terms of human history, came from the line of David. Our job, in a sense, is to bring Christ to the world; Christ, so

to speak, is to be birthed through us, the Church, so that the world might see Him. This is what Jesus said to His disciples:

I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy (John 16:20-22).

Jesus is saying, "I am going to die, but you are going to suffer. And the suffering and pain that you experience is just like a woman giving birth because as you identify with me in my suffering, you are bringing forth the purposes of God." You and I are here to give birth to sons in this the world. Paul puts it in these terms to the Galatians:

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you (Galatians 4:19).

Have you given birth lately? Have you felt the birth pangs? God wants to use you to bring forth redemptive and ruling sons, sons who will share the throne and have authority over the nations. It is time for Zion to bring forth her sons to the glory of God.