

Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant

Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:6–9)

- First referenced in: Gen 12, 15, 17, 18, 26, and 28 with the words: promise, covenant, oath, and everlasting (Gen 17:17)
- Made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and by extension the nation of Israel (Exo 6:5)

5 Aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant Promises

1. **Land:** God promises land to Abram, Isaac, and Jacob and then gives the entire nation of Israel the promised land of Canaan to live upon, provided they remain faithful to the Mosaic Covenant. In the land, Israel struggles with idolatry and sexual sins with the pagans. When they fail to obey the Law of Moses, God scatters them, and when they cry out for mercy, God brings them back. This cycle continues throughout the entire Old Testament. Eventually, the true people of God will inherit the new earth as an everlasting possession in the ultimate fulfillment of this promise (2Pe 3:13).
2. **Great Nation (offspring):** Initially Abram is promised to be made into a great nation without a son or daughter. God solves this problem with the miraculous birth of Isaac who will father Jacob who will be renamed Israel as the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. In Exodus, these tribes will become the great nation of Israel. Eventually, kings will rule Israel until God brings the dynasty of David to an end, in anticipation of King Jesus. A component of the “nation” promise is the promise to provide descendants who will number like the stars of the sky and dust of the earth. Ultimately, God fulfills this amazing promise with spiritual descendants of Abraham. In Galatians 3, Paul explains how every person who has faith in Christ, and faith in the promises of the gospel, is a son or daughter of Abraham, the man of faith. Thus, the entire body of Christ can be described as offspring of Abraham. In 1 Peter 2:9, all those who are saved, the true people of God, are described as a chosen race and holy nation. The “great nation” promise continues with the Jews and Gentiles who are Jews inwardly, by faith in Christ and the gospel, and are citizens of the true Israel of God (Gal 6).
3. **Great Name:** It goes without saying, God made Abraham’s name great (John 8:53). Four thousand years after his death Christians, Jews, and even Muslims are still talking about the patriarch Abraham. He is referenced over 70 times in the NT. Isaiah 41:8 describes him as a friend of God.
4. **Bless and Curse:** As the narrative of Genesis and the Old Testament is unpacked, the reader notices that those who take care of Abraham and his descendants are blessed by a sovereign God, and those who dishonor Israel are cursed by the same God. This notion of “bless those who bless” is seen throughout Joseph’s life (Gen 37ff) and the notion of “curse those who curse” is seen in Exodus in the destruction of Pharaoh for the way he treated God’s covenant people.
5. **All the families of the earth shall be blessed:** In Genesis 18:18, 22:18, and 26:4 this promise is expanded to “in you all the nations [lit. ethnicities] of the earth shall be blessed.” In Galatians 3, Paul explains that the blessing the nations receive is the good news that both Jews and all ethnicities can be declared righteous, justified, or in a legal state of right standing with God, by faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus commissioned His apostles to preach the gospel to the nations and make disciples of all nations (Mark 16:15-18, Mat 28:19-20). Every disciple of Christ is a son or daughter of Abraham and receives the amazing blessing of exchanging their sin for the righteousness of Christ through faith in Christ and His gospel. They also receive the promise of the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer as a seal of their right standing with God – the record of their sin has been canceled (Col 2:14).

Sign of the Covenant

Physical circumcision of the foreskin was replaced by the circumcision of the heart, spiritual conversion or regeneration, by God’s Spirit (Rom 2:29). This work of the Spirit makes it possible for the believer to love and obey God (Deu 30:9, Eze 36:26). The heart of a human, biblically speaking, is who they are at their very core. A believer’s flesh/sin nature stays with them until death, but after this circumcision, they are no longer enslaved to it or to sin.