

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT



An Outline Summary

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I. OVERVIEW

God invited Abraham into a special relationship with him called a covenant. A covenant is a faithful agreement between two parties. As his part of the covenant, God made important promises to Abraham. These promises extended far beyond Abraham's own lifetime, to involve his descendants as well. As such, God's covenant with Abraham is global and even eternal in scope. That's why God's 4,000-year-old covenant with Abraham is vitally important for your life as a believer today. The promises apply not just to Abraham's literal descendants, but others can also become adopted children of Abraham and thus receive the same promises.

II. THE COVENANT PROMISES

A. THE PROMISE OF A GREAT LAND (GENESIS 12:1)

1. Its boundaries (Genesis 15:18-21).
2. Its possession: Never fully occupied in the past but greatest under Solomon (1 Kings 4:21; 2 Chron. 9:25-26).
3. Its historical names: Canaan, Israel, Palestine.
4. This land will belong to Abram and all his descendants (Gen. 17:8).
5. Bible scholars differ on whether the nation of Israel will occupy the Promised Land in the future.
 - No (amillennial and postmillennial view): Israel forfeited its right to the Promised Land as a result of their spiritual rebellion, which was consummated by their murder of the Messiah. (see Joshua 23:15-16).¹
 - Yes (premillennial view): Israel will actually be given its Promised Land in the period following the second coming of Christ when Christ will reign on earth (see Genesis 13:14-15).²

B. THE PROMISE OF A GREAT NATION (GENESIS 12:2)

1. "I will make you into a great nation" (12:2)
2. Before a great nation is formed Abram's descendants will be enslaved and mistreated for 400 years in a strange land (Gen. 15:13-14).

¹ Wayne Jackson, *Genesis 15:18 – Will Israel Once Again Possess the Promised Land?* <<https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/402-genesis-15-18-will-israel-once-again-possess-the-promised-land>>.

² John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, P. 75.

- Jacob's family entering Egypt totaled about 70 people (Exod. 1:1-5).
- In Egypt for 430 years (Exod. 12:40).
- They lived in the region of Goshen (Egypt) where they were isolated from the Egyptian culture and religions. There they thrived and grew in number (Gen. 47:27).
- At the Exodus the Hebrews numbers 600,000 men besides women and children (Exod. 12:37). It is estimated that the total number of Hebrews was about two million, making them effectively a nation of Hebrews.

C. THE PROMISE OF A GREAT BLESSING (GENESIS 12:2-3; 17:5, 15-16; 18:18)

1. Abram will personally be blessed, even his name will be great.
2. His name is alter changed from Abram ("exalted father") to Abraham ("father of many nations") in Genesis 17:5.
3. Sarai's name ("my princess") was also changed to Sarah ("mother of nations") in Genesis 17:15-16.
 - God changed names in the Bible to give the person a new identity.
 - Nations: Jacob-Nation of Israel, Esau-Edomites, Ishmael-Ishmaelites (Arabs?), Keturah-Midianites.
 - Although the term "father" normally denotes a biological relationship, the Bible contains examples of its being used metaphorically. Examples: Joseph describes himself as "father to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8: also Judges 17:10 where Micah invites a young Levite to be his "father").³
4. Those who bless him will be blessed and those who curse him will be cursed.
 - Some Bible scholars see this applying only to Abram himself, while others see it applying to both Abram and his descendants ("I will make you into a great nation...").
5. All the people on earth will be blessed through Abram (18:18). This blessing is for all people who put their faith in Christ and are counted as righteous (Gal. 3:6-9 NLT).
6. It is through the Jewish people many contributions have been made to the world.⁴

D. THE PROMISE OF FULFILLMENT (GENESIS 15:17-18A)

1. Walking between the two halves of sacrificed animals was an ancient

³ (ESV Crossway Bibles 79, Notes).

⁴ For a partial list of these contributions see "Jews in the Medical and Life Sciences, <http://www.jinfo.org/Biomedical_Research.html>.

ritual showing that two parties were in full agreement with a covenant.

- After the animal was sacrificed, both parties of the covenant would be between the pieces of the sacrificed animals, beginning with the one higher in authority, then the lower.
 - The act signifies that if either party fails to keep its part of the covenant then may his blood will be spilled on the floor like the sacrificed animals.
2. The smoking pot and the blazing torch were a "theophany," an outward external manifestation of the invisible God, much like the burning bush to Moses and the pillar of fire during the Exodus.
 - In the narrative itself, we're not told what these two items represent.
 - However, fire is often associated with both God's judgment and His holiness.
 - In addition, these elements of smoke, fire, and the various kinds of animals later used for sacrifice under the Law point to God's future relationship with Israel.
 3. God himself moves between the pieces of animals, while Abram sleeps, emphasizing the one-sided nature of this covenant (an unconditional, unilateral promise to be kept by God alone).

III. THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT (GENESIS 17:10-14)

1. The physical sign of the covenant is the circumcision of all males when they are eight days old.
2. This applies also to those "bought with money from a foreigner."

IV. ABRAM'S RESPONSE (GENESIS 15:6)

"Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." (Gen. 15:6 NIV).