

The Abrahamic Covenant

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The covenant that God made with Abraham commonly referred to as the "Abrahamic Covenant" begins to unfold in Genesis 12 (see notes). In that passage we see the call to Abraham to leave his people, take his wife and move to Canaan. This initial call constitutes the first of several communications between God and Abraham regarding the provisions of God's covenant with him. The purpose of this document is to give a brief overview of the covenant's provisions. For added detail, follow the links listed; each link will open a new window in which you will be able to view the detailed commentary for each passage.

Here are the four basic provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant:

Special favor with God

Notice the specific language of Genesis 12:1-3 (see notes), "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: 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. It is clear in this passage that God establishes a special relationship with Abraham. The question is, how far does this promise extend with regard to time and descendants? In other words, through Ishmael, Abraham's physical descendants extend over the entire Arabian Peninsula and beyond. However, Ishmael and his descendants are not included in this specific promise. We know that to be the case because of the additional promise from God to Isaac in Genesis 21:12 (see notes), "And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called." Moreover, God specifically excluded Ishmael in Genesis 17:19-21 (see notes), "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. 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. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year." Subsequently, God spoke to Isaac in Genesis 26:3-4 (see notes), "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

That brings up another question: What about Esau's descendants? Are they included in the provisions of Genesis 12:1-3? The short answer is "no." We see that the promise originally made to Abraham and extended through Isaac is further extended through Jacob only in Genesis 28:13-14 (see notes), "And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." There it is - essentially the same promise God gave to Abraham and confirmed to Isaac. We see that it is renewed by God to Jacob once again in Genesis 35:9-12 (see notes).

Based upon these passages, it is scripturally indisputable that God established a special relationship with Abraham which extended specifically through the blood line of Isaac, Jacob and then to the twelve sons of Jacob, who later became the twelve tribes of Israel. There is no expiration date on this covenant according to Genesis 17:7 (see notes), "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." These promises are later confirmed by the Old Testament prophets and Jesus himself. For Believers today, we view prophetic events in light of the promise that was first made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3.

Land provisions

The first mention of specific land allocated to Abraham is found in Genesis 13:15-17 (see notes), "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee." The boundaries are not specified in this passage, but they are in Genesis 15:18 (see notes), "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." You will notice the extensive boundaries found here - from "the river of Egypt" (aka Nile River) to the "Euphrates." In fact, under David's rule the Nation of Israel apparently controlled everything between those two rivers. [Click here to see the map of Israel's holdings under David.](#)

God confirmed this land to Joshua in Joshua 1:4 (see notes), "From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast." The "great sea" is a reference to the Mediterranean Sea. Then in II Samuel 8:3 (see notes) we see, "David smote also Hadadezer, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to recover his border at the river Euphrates." That provides verification for us that David did, in fact, control the land all the way up to the Euphrates River north of land where the tribes dwelled. In addition to these references, Deuteronomy 1:7 (see notes) and Deuteronomy 11:24 (see notes) both list the northern boundaries of Israel at the Euphrates River.

Israel's control over this land extended into Solomon's reign as is seen in I Kings 4:21, 24 (see notes). Verse 21 says, "And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life." Verse 24 continues, "For he had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tiphshah even to Azzah, over all the kings on this side the river: and he had peace on all sides round about him." In that verse, "the river" is a reference to the Euphrates.

Special favor to Abraham's physical offspring

That the Abrahamic Covenant provides for special favor to the physical offspring of Abraham is undeniable. The essence of the promise in Genesis 12:1-3 (see notes) specifically addresses Abraham's physical offspring when God says, "I will make of thee a great nation." That nation became Israel.

The physical descendants of Abraham received a token of the Abrahamic Covenant - circumcision. Abraham was told by God in Genesis 17:10 (see notes), "Every man child among you shall be circumcised." God adds in verse 11, "...it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you."

Special favor to Abraham's spiritual seed

Those who have trusted Jesus Christ for salvation are included in this category as clearly stated by Paul in Galatians 3:16 (see notes). "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." Paul makes a distinction between the singular and plural usage of the word "seed" in the promises made to Abraham. Paul's distinction in that passage references the "seed" terminology used in the following passages:

Genesis 13:16 (see notes) And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

Genesis 15:5 (see notes) And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

Genesis 16:10 (see notes) And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.

While some of the seed references given to Abraham obviously pertain to physical blessings given to the Hebrews themselves, Paul uses a fine point of grammar here to extend the promise of spiritual blessings to all of those who trust Jesus Christ as their Savior. In other words, we have salvation today in Christ because of the promise that God made to Abraham. The people through the ages who have been blessed with salvation in Jesus Christ are innumerable, just as Paul points out in verse 16.

God's promise to Abraham was unconditional and confirmed with a covenant ceremony in Genesis 15:7-21 (see notes). Moreover, we see that the provisions of this covenant are "everlasting" in Genesis 17:7 (see notes). That being the case, New Testament Believers benefit through Christ from the covenant that God made with Abraham.