


# Israel and the Abrahamic Covenant



**T**HE FUTURE OF WORLD EVENTS is not centered in Moscow or Washington, London or Beijing, but in Jerusalem. In our study of Romans 9–11, we learn that there is a future for the nation of Israel. “And in this way all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26). There are those who erroneously teach that all of the Old Testament promises to Israel now find their total fulfillment in the New Testament church. But the church of Jesus Christ has not replaced Israel.

The Old Testament Scriptures certainly predicted a distinct future for Israel. The New Testament reinforces these promises. “Behold he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him” (Revelation 1:7). At present, Israel is in unbelief, but there is still a believing remnant. The central and unifying factor in Israel’s future is the Abrahamic Covenant. It is important that we understand what a large and important subject is this covenant.

## THE MAKING OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Abraham was a man of faith (Genesis 12:1–4). The Lord called Abraham from his home, his country, and relatives. He left Ur, which was a great city of the Chaldeans, located 220 miles southeast of Baghdad, Iraq. Abraham trusted God and left Ur “not knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8). His faith was not a theoretical one but was demonstrated by his obedience. He believed God and acted on that belief!

Although the covenant was not made in Genesis 12, note the promises in verses two and three. The covenant is established and confirmed in Genesis 15:7, 13, 17–18. In other covenants, both parties walked between the pieces of the animals. In this case, only God — not Abraham — passed between the parts. God unilaterally ratifies the covenant in this symbolic way, demonstrating that He was solely responsible for this covenant. The promises are guaranteed by God Himself. The keeping of the covenant is as certain and sure as the living God.

Therefore, once the covenant is established, its continuing validity is unconditional (Genesis 17:7, 13b, 19). The continuation of the covenant does not rest on Abraham’s descendants fulfilling certain conditions. If the covenant had been dependent upon them being faithful and obedient, it would have ended long ago. The Abrahamic Covenant is an irrevocable, everlasting promise.

The continuation of the Abrahamic Covenant is reaffirmed in Genesis 26:3–5, 28:13–14, 35:11–12, and Genesis 50:24. The future of the Abrahamic Covenant is not dependent upon the spiritual state of the nation of Israel.

*“He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, ‘To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance’” (Psalm 105:8–11).*

## TERMS OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

### **Personal Blessings**

God promised Abraham personal greatness (Genesis 12:2). Abraham is one of the greatest and best known people in human history. He is revered by Jews (being the father of their nation), by Muslims (being the father of Ishmael), and by Christians (the Messiah being a son of Abraham, Matthew 1:1). He is the father of kings (Genesis 17:6) as well as a father of nations (Muslims and Jews). Abraham was a great man, personally blessed by God.

## National Blessings

In the Abrahamic Covenant, the promise was that God would make Abraham a great nation (Genesis 12:2, 15:5, 22:17). Israel was to have a unique relationship with God:

*“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt”* (Deuteronomy 7:6–8).

*“And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods? And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O Lord, became their God”* (2 Samuel 7: 23–24).

Through the Abrahamic Covenant, the Jewish nation has been blessed: “And I will make of you a great nation” (Genesis 12:2). The sign of the Abrahamic Covenant for the Jewish nation was circumcision (Genesis 17:9–13). Circumcision was a daily reminder to Abraham and his descendants that God would not go back on His promises; that God would not reject His people. Circumcision was also a reminder that the Jewish nation should be faithful to God and separated from the pagan nations — a reminder of the need for purity and separation.

The world Jewish population today is estimated at 13 million in a world of six billion people. Yet, arguably they are the greatest people and nation in all of the world — certainly the greatest survivors in spite of the almost continuous persecution against them throughout history. David Brooks, the NY Times

columnist, wrote, “Jews are a famously accomplished group. They make up 0.2% of the world population, but 54% of the world chess champions, 27% of the Nobel physics laureates and 31% of the medicine laureates. Jews make up 2% of the US population, but 21% of the Ivy League student bodies, 26% of the Kennedy Center honorees, 37% of the Academy Award-winning directors, 38% of those on a recent Business Week list of leading philanthropists, 51% of the Pulitzer Prize winners for nonfiction... Tel Aviv has become one of the world’s foremost entrepreneurial hot spots. Israel has more high-tech start-ups per capita than any other nation on earth, by far. It leads the world in civilian research-and-development spending per capita. It ranks second behind the US in the number of companies listed on the Nasdaq” (David Brooks, “The Tel Aviv Cluster,” *New York Times*, 11 January 2010).

The contribution of the Jewish nation in philosophy, science, literature, music, politics, and finance is incalculable. God has taken this small nation, Israel, and made it one of the most influential nations in world history. God has made of Abraham a great nation through national blessings.

### **Universal Blessings**

God promised Abraham that through him there would be universal blessings: “in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). Those who blessed Abraham and his descendants would be blessed by God. Those who cursed Abraham and his descendants would be cursed by God (Genesis 12:3).

The Jewish nation has been cursed and persecuted throughout its history. It has been persecuted by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Romans, the Third Reich, and many others. Six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust of WWII. But all of these great empires, which once persecuted the Jews, no longer exist. Where are the Canaanites, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Ottomans, and others who once were in the Promised Land? All gone. But the Jewish nation is there and flourishing!

The blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant come not only to the Jewish nation, but to Gentiles: “in you (Abraham) all the families of the earth shall be blessed”

(Genesis 12:3). Through Jesus Christ, the Son of Abraham, the universal blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant are available to all, including Gentiles. Our Savior is the mediator of all the promises of the covenant. The true sons and heirs of Abraham are those who are justified not by works, but by faith. Through Jesus Christ, the Son of Abraham and the mediator of the Abrahamic Covenant, spiritual blessings flow to all who believe (Galatians 3:6–9, 13–14, 26–29). But those blessings to the Gentiles do not abrogate a future blessing for Israel.

### Land Blessings

The land was also promised to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12:2, 7, 15:18, 17:7–8). God is guaranteeing that the land of Canaan will be Israel’s land. What a promise! The land of Israel is in the strategic center of the world — the hub of three continents: Asia, Europe, and Africa. That small piece of real estate has been fought over throughout history and continues to be the most disputed piece of real estate in the world. It is still at the center of the Middle East crisis. Israel’s population today is just under six million, compared with the over 200 million population of the Arab countries surrounding it. It occupies only 8,000 square miles, compared with over five million square miles occupied by all the Arab states. Yet, some of Israel’s enemies still seek to push the small Jewish nation into the Mediterranean Sea.

God promised to Abraham that He would give the land “to you and your offspring forever” (Genesis 13:14–17). It would be “an everlasting possession” (Genesis 17:8). Its boundaries would extend from the River of Egypt in the west to the Euphrates River in the east, and the land of the Hittites in the north (Genesis 15:18–21). God has granted the title deed of the land of Israel to the Jewish people. It is incorrect to say that the Church spiritually fulfills this land promise. God will not go back on His promise.

*“Then say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land” (Ezekiel 37:21).*

*“I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore” (Ezekiel 37:26). ❀*