

Bible Study on Hermeneutics – Handout 4

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Biblical Covenants

Associated with and integral to right biblical interpretation are the covenants. Covenants are contractual agreements made between God and people throughout Biblical history as part of God's redeeming purposes. A correct interpretation is important to understand the purpose of each covenant in relation to God's plan for man. How covenants are interpreted therefore affects the broader view of the Bible, and the meaning of many of the books, verses, chapters, and verses of Scripture. Each interpreter's position on the covenants will affect doctrines, practices, beliefs related to salvation, Israel, the church, and future events. The importance of the covenants cannot be overemphasized because they relate directly to one's understanding of what God has done and is doing with mankind, and the establishment of His ultimate kingdom.

Covenant or Testament in relation to the accepted division of the OT with the NT

Covenant or Testament is a synonym of the Scripture. Paul wrote about the "reading of the old covenant" (2 Cor. 3:14). The Greek word is *diatheke*, "covenant," testament, or will. When looking at the Bible in general we know it is divided into the "Old Testament" and the "New Testament," or as some declare the "Old Covenant," and the "New Covenant." It is not that the OT can ultimately be defined as one covenant, and the NT as the New Covenant, but is instead a manner of recognizing the Bible is filled with significant covenants made between God and man. These accomplish God's purposes of showing man his sin, and preparation for Messiah. The OT covenants all lead to Christ, while the NT provides the expansion of and fulfillment of the New Covenant in Christ.

The Hebrew word for covenant/ or testament is *beriyth* (tyrb), means literally, a treaty, alliance or agreement. All of these "agreements" are made between God and people. As they are not two equal parties, but are made by God at His sovereign and purposeful instigation on Man's behalf, translators have always felt the need to distinguish all the older covenants from the one New Covenant of grace in Christ. All covenants have an essential role, and must be understood in their context. They obviously carry great significance as God has chosen to bind Himself to fulfill all that He has promised.

From **the Old Testament** (comes a series of contractual promises each with specific purposes, to Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, etc.; cf. (Acts 13:23; 13:32-33; 26:6; Rom.4:13; 9:4; Gal.3:16; 3:29; 4:28; Eph.3:6; 2Tim.1:1; Heb.4:1; 6:12; 9:15; 10:36; 11:38-39; 1Jn.2:25) as integral parts and pieces progressively revealed related to God's overall redemptive plan with the **promise of blessing, salvation, restoration of man to God, a kingdom, and ultimate eternal life** (and all that it would entail). **The New Testament**, with the focus on Christ and the **New Covenant** is essentially God's gracious answer and means of **fulfillment of all promises** (through Christ's incarnation, sacrifice, resurrection, ascension, and establishment of His kingdom). The Old Covenant is thus a looking forward through the shadows to the New Covenant, the reality of Christ and the fulfillment of all God's promises through Him (1Cor.11:25; 2Cor.3:6; Heb.9:15).

From our perspective, we then look specifically and carefully at these various covenants to understand their place or fit in the overall plan of God. This is a great hope and joy because we do so with the recognition that God must fulfill all that He has promised (Tit 1:2). It behooves us, therefore to study the covenants using hermeneutical principles so that our hope and understanding will be fixed properly on the surety of what God has promised. By doing so we can enjoy with clarity a vision of what God has done, is doing, and yet will do.

Do not confuse “Covenant Theology” with a study of the Biblical Covenants

“**Covenant Theology**” is an encompassing title for a general type of system of interpretation of the Bible. It is common in many Presbyterian and Reformed churches (and others). It describes God’s plan for the salvation of man by defining in either two or three overarching covenants that God the Father made with Christ and with man. These covenants are not the same as those clearly given to Abraham, Moses, David, etc., but they are instead strongly implied (according to Covenant theology) from within Scripture. The covenants of “Covenant Theology” are then theological covenants. These covenants are a systematic way to describe God’s plan and work of salvation. These theological covenants are: the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace.

Covenant of Works

God made a covenant with Adam (as the representative of all mankind) where God promised Adam eternal life if he obeyed God and death if he disobeyed. Although God did convey the restrictions of eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17), there is no specific mention of greater details or as such a formal covenant with Adam. It is implied.

Covenant of Grace

A covenant was made between God and the elect to provide salvation through Christ’s atoning work on the cross. Again, this is not stated formally as a covenant, but implied (Eph 1:3-14 with phrases like, “which He purposed” (vs 9), “according to the plan” (vs 11). It is true and Scriptural that God has had a plan to save from the beginning. The Covenant Theologian has put a name to the plan, and implied a formal covenant - the Covenant of Grace.

Covenant of Redemption

Sometime in eternity past, God the Father made a covenant of Redemption with God the Son in which they agreed to redeem men (hence the term redemption). The Father appointed the Son to be the redeemer through His death. Scripture used to support this: (Heb 10:10f, John 17:4, 18).

None of these implied covenants nor the system of theology known as “Covenant Theology” should be confused with a study of the biblical stated and formal covenants, not merely implied, but clearly stated in the Word of God.

What is the Biblical meaning of a Covenant?

It is a formal and official agreement between two parties binding themselves to one another by oath to fulfill their solemn promises and/or obligations.

It can be between persons

- For treaties or alliances (Gen 14:13; 31:44; Josh 9:6-16)
- Between rulers and subjects (2 Sam 3:12-21; 53; Jer 34:8-18)
- Between friends or associates (2 Kings 11:4; Job 31:1; Hos 10:4; 1 Sam 18:3; 20:8; 23:18)

It can be between God and men (Gen 9:1-18; 15:1-21; Ex 20:1-17)

A formal Biblical Covenant consists of these basic identifiable components.

- The identity of the subjects included
- The conditions of agreement giving the obligations and promises
- The ramifications of agreement giving either the benefits or punishments associated with fulfillment
- The witnesses of the agreement – God and those present.
- The confirmation of the agreement – a sign, token, or reminder – exchange of gifts (Gen 21:27-30), use of a monument (Gen 31:45-48), exchange of salt to show the preservation (Num

18:19), exchange of personal objects for identity and commitment (Ruth 4:7-8; 1 Sam 18:4), and sacrifice of animals to show the magnitude including the death penalty for violation (Jer 34:12-20).

Classifications of Biblical Covenants

The classification of a covenant is very important to the understanding relative to who the covenant is with.

- A Parity Covenant – made between two equal parties
- A Suzerainty Covenant (a suzerain is a sovereign ruler, or ruling authority such as a king) – designed to protect the ruler by imposition of law, rules, or will upon the subjects.
- A Promissory Covenant – is where one of the parties of the agreement imposes a solemn oath or promise of fulfillment on behalf of the other party. It can be between a Suzerain and subjects, or between equals.

Types of Biblical Covenants

The type of a covenant is very important relative to the understanding of its fulfillment.

- A Conditional Covenant – one of the parties of the agreement must fulfill responsibilities according to the terms of the agreement with the other party (If you do then I will...)
- An Unconditional Covenant – one of the parties of the agreement will fulfill responsibilities regardless of the action of the other party – one party promises to do something no matter what (I will....).

Key Covenants in the Bible

The Abrahamic Covenant – God’s Covenant with Abraham

This is the grand covenant from which the other covenants: Palestinian, Mosaic, Davidic, and New all have a relationship related to fulfillment, furtherance, or amplification.

- Classification is a **Promissory Covenant** – God as one of the parties of the agreement imposes a solemn oath or promise of fulfillment on behalf of the other party.
- Type of covenant – **an Unconditional Covenant** (Gen 12; 13; and 15) – God is the sovereign ruler of the covenant making Himself obligated and responsible to do several things – there are no stipulations placed upon Abraham. Therefore, whatever this covenant describes must be accomplished. God cannot go back on His Covenant, and Abraham is required to do nothing as a condition.
- This covenant promised special benefits to Abraham, and to those identified through and with Abraham. It consists of three general categories: Blessings, land, and descendants.
 - **Blessings:**
 - He was to have a significant or great name in the earth (Gen 12:2).
 - He was to be made a source of blessing to others (Gen 12:2-3).
 - He was to have a special place before God’s watchful eye so that the Lord would deal with others in accordance to how they dealt with Abraham (Gen 12:3).
 - He was promised an eternal covenant relationship with God (Gen 15:1; 17:7).
 - A universal promise was made that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham (Gen 12:3).
 - **Land:**
 - He and his descendants were promised possession of specified land in Canaan as an everlasting possession (Gen 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:7; 17:8).
 - **Descendants:**
 - He was promised a child with whom God would establish the covenant and bring forth a great nation (Gen 12:2; 17:1-7).
 - They were to be very large in number (Gen 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 22:17).
 - They were promised the same everlasting covenant relationship (Gen 17:7).

- They were promised to ultimately possess the gate of their enemies (Gen 22:17).
 - They were promised the same special place before God's watchful eye so that the Lord would deal with others in accordance to how they dealt by them (Gen 12:3; Num 24:9).
- The confirmation of the Covenant was signified in two substantial ways – by the sacrifice of animals indicating the pledge of life for fulfillment (Gen 15:9-17), and it was symbolized through the sign of circumcision (Gen 17:9-14).

How was or is the Abrahamic Covenant fulfilled?

The two largest groups of interpretation are “Covenant Theology” and “Dispensational Theology.” Almost all theologians fall within these two classifications. The manner of interpretation is hermeneutical, and very significant in relation to biblical understanding.

The Covenant theological approach – from the writings of Randal A. Radic, THD, STD, Pastor

Who are the descendants spoken of in the covenant?

After explaining the blood descendants who are now a remnant, he goes on to say “there are also those who are like Abraham. This group consists of those who have faith in God and the promise. The remnant are those who are the true Israel, those who have faith. They have a faith, a heart that comes from God; and true Israel also has the blood of Abraham in their veins.

- **Mat 3:9** and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

Here then, John the Baptist told the collective Israel that they were not true Israel. In other words, John the Baptist said prove that you are the children of Abraham – the works of Abraham, i.e. Have faith.

- **Joh 8:39** They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus *said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham."

Our Lord, then, is stating that these Jews are Israelites, they are the descendants of Abraham, but they are not really true Israel, even though the blood of Abraham flows in their veins.

- **Luk 19:9** And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham."

Thus, Christ said that Zacchaeus heart was like Abraham's: a lifestyle of love and of salvation, and faith.

- **Rom 2:28-29** For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

A real Jew is one by faith like Abraham.

- **Gal 3:7** Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

A son of Abraham, then, has nothing to do with the blood in ones veins, but everything to do with what is in the heart.

- **Gal 3:29** And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

Who then is a descendant of Abraham? Anyone who believes in Christ.

- **Gal 3:16-17** Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

Who is the seed? Gal 3:16-17 provide the answer. Christ is the seed (descendant). And all those in Him become the descendants of Abraham...not by blood, but by faith."

What about the blessing of the covenant?

"All those in Christ are blessed. And the word blessing means 'empowered, and successful' in body, mind, spirit, and thought. Thus, when the Church Age believer is filled with the Spirit, this believer is blessed or empowered with success in every way. For "through you (Abraham) all nations of the world will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).

- **Gal. 3:13-14** 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.'

So your receiving of the Holy Spirit was the promise that God promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. Then when you believe in Christ, you are an heir of the promise."

What about the land spoken of in the covenant?

"When Adam fell, he ceded rulership of the earth to Satan. The 'land' is a shadow of something to come. The receiving of the land was part of a covenant:

- **Deu 5:32-33** "So you shall observe to do just as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong *your* days in the land which you will possess."

This passage states that if the covenant was obeyed they would live long in the land.

- **Deu 6:3** "O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do *it*, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, *in* a land flowing with milk and honey.

If they obey God, they will live in the land. Deut. 8:19,20, state that if they fall into idolatry, they will lose the land. Deut. 11:13-15, states that if they obey, then good weather will be theirs, if not, they will perish from the land. Thus the land was conditioned by obedience. The land was a reflection of their hearts. They could not sin against God and stay in the land. For the land is conditional.

- **Rom 4:13** For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

And Romans 4:13 states that Abraham was to inherit the whole world. And according to Hebrews 11:10, Abraham was looking beyond the 'land' to the 'city that God would build.'" God then, gave Abraham the 'land' in a geographical sense, but Abraham saw beyond the shadow 'land,' the geographical land, to "the new heaven and the new earth." And remember, the 'land' was given to Abraham as an 'everlasting possession.' This, then, would be a land in Gods scope, and of Gods making. Thus, Abraham finally understood Gods promise. He saw the 'everlasting' aspect of the promise; and he looked forward to the real land that was promised,

not just the physical/geographical land of Canaan. So Abraham saw beyond the shadow land, the one made of dust and dirt, to the land that was promised. For the covenant spoke of a covenant land, a heavenly land.

Summary of Covenant theology on Abrahamic covenant: The CT says that because of disobedience and rejection of Messiah, Israel has forfeited the land promises. The land is just a picture of the place of God's blessing. For Israel, that place of God's blessing was the land of Canaan. For us, that place is being in Christ. The CT would turn to Hebrews 3:18ff as an example. The writer of Hebrews said that Moses couldn't lead the Israelites into their rest (i.e. the land) because of their disobedience and lack of faith. In the same way the audience to Hebrews is being warned against disobedience and told they can't enter their rest (i.e. Christ) without faith.

The Dispensational (or literal) theological approach

Who are the descendants spoken of in the covenant?

There are first of all two distinct groups seen in the initial presentation of the Abrahamic Covenant - the blood descendants of Abraham, and the Gentiles. The "you a great nation" refers to his blood descendants, and the "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" refers to the Gentiles.

- **Gen 12:2-3** And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

An examination of additional references to the descendants of Abraham as Scripture progresses reveals that the expression "descendant(s)" is used in several distinct senses:

- (1) There is the natural use, i.e., the natural seed of Abraham referring to those who are actual physical descendants of Abraham, and of those shown later in follow-up passages reiterating the covenant to be in the line through Isaac, Jacob and the 12 tribes – this is the "great nation" spoken concerning in numerous passages.
- **Deu 10:15** "Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, *even* you above all peoples, as *it is* this day.

Promises made to Abraham were then specifically made to his physical descendants through Isaac and Jacob. They have peculiar promises and blessings in relation to God that no other people on earth have.

- **Rom 9:3-5** For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, **9:5** whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.
- (2) From the physical lineage through Isaac, it is used in reference to the spiritual lineage coming from Abraham. The distinction between natural Israel and spiritual Israel is revealed.
 - **Rom 9:6-8** But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

It must be noted that although it is the spiritual lineage coming from Abraham that have the ultimate promises of a glorious future, these are still the actual blood descendants first, and then from the blood descendants comes the spiritual descendants that carry the literal fulfillment of the promise from God. God cannot be through with a literal Israel because of His unconditional covenant. The "New Covenant" is used of God to complete the promises originally made in the

Abrahamic Covenant. The "New Covenant" is always given in the context of Jewish restoration according to the promises originally made to Abraham.

- **Eze 36:24-28** "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. **36:25**"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. **36:26** "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **36:27** "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. **36:28** "You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.
- **Jer 31:31-33** "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, **31:32** not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. **31:33** "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

There are numerous reiterations of the unconditional promise of a physical great nation of Abraham's Descendants throughout the OT. They are further connected with the progressive revealing of God's plan for the covenant to Abraham, then Isaac, Jacob, then through the Davidic Covenant whereby Messiah will rule over Israel in a coming physical glorious kingdom. This covenant is then reiterated through all the OT prophets. These look beyond the temporal consequences of the conditional Mosaic Covenant, with its destructions of Israel and captivity; and continue to focus on a regathering, and a yet glorious future. These promises are emphatic and clear.

- **Isa 9:7** There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.
- **Isa 49:15** "Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.
- **Isa 54:7** "For a brief moment I forsook you, But with great compassion I will gather you. **54:8** "In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, But with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you," Says the LORD your Redeemer.
- **Isa 60:15-16** "Whereas you have been forsaken and hated With no one passing through, I will make you an everlasting pride, A joy from generation to generation. **60:16** "You will also suck the milk of nations And suck the breast of kings; Then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.
- **Jer 31:20** "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a delightful child? Indeed, as often as I have spoken against him, I certainly *still* remember him; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him," declares the LORD.
- **Jer 31:35** Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: **31:36** "If this fixed order departs From before Me," declares the LORD, "Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever."

Currently there is a remnant of Israel, and there has always been a remnant of those in which He has a special relationship.

- **2Ki 19:31** 'For out of Jerusalem will go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion survivors. The zeal of the LORD will perform this.
- **Rom 11:5** In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice.

The ultimate and complete restoration of Israel is both physical and spiritual. For God has provided clear prophecy built on the Abrahamic Covenant of what He will do in restoring and saving Israel. The promises made to Abraham did not mean that every single descendant would be saved (as the Pharisees believed in the time of Christ), but it does mean there will come a time when "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:25-27) - those alive at the time of the return of Christ will make up the promised Israel with Christ ruling.

- **Zec 9:16** And the LORD their God will save them in that day As the flock of His people; For *they are as* the stones of a crown, Sparkling in His land.
- **Zec 12:10** "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.
- **Rom 11:25-27** For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery--so that you will not be wise in your own estimation--that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; **11:26** and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." **11:27** "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

(3) In Galatians saved Gentiles are specifically recognized as the children of Abraham under the promise given for Gentiles, and not under promises given to the physical seed of Abraham. This is clearly shown by the portion of the Abrahamic covenant quoted by Paul:

- **Gal 3:8** The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU."

A Gentile in the present age is Abraham's seed because he is "in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). It is on this basis that Gal 3:29 states:

- **Gal 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **3:29** And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

One of the mistakes made by the Galatians (Jews professing Christ) was to confuse the conditional commands (laws) of the Mosaic Covenant with the unconditional promises of the Abrahamic Covenant.

- **Gal 3:17** What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

The Mosaic Covenant (Deut 11:26-28) provided a structure through which any individual Israelite and any generation of Israel could participate in the Abrahamic promise of blessing. In other words, it was a means through which any generation of Israel could realize that promise of blessing in their own day. Unlike the Abrahamic covenant that was unconditional, the Mosaic was conditional and promised blessings in accordance with obedience.

(4) Beyond the initial details of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Old Testament continues to provide progressive revelation building on the promise God made initially after the fall, utilizing Abraham and his descendants. The Old Testament reveals increasingly more detail about the "blessings" of God through One "Descendant" of Abraham. This is particularly seen in the Davidic Covenant, followed by increasing detail of a coming Prophet, Priest, and King – the Messiah. This is the One of course who will cause "all the nations of the earth to be blessed."

- **2Sa 7:16** "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.""

- **Gal 3:16** Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

The stress placed on "seed" (descendant) rather than "seeds" (descendants) from Gen 12:7; 13:15; 24:7 is made to remind that from the beginning of prophecy, following the fall, God had promised, and it was recognized by the faithful, that blessing would ultimately come through a single individual – the Messiah.

- **Gen 15:5** And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

Some scholars argue this verse where "count" is translated refers to "decipher" the stars (for example in Gen 40:8 the same word is translated "tell" referring to an explanation) – what we today term the sign of the Zodiac is a 12 star picture of the birth of Christ, and the word "descendants" is really singular referring to One descendant, Christ. Regardless, of the descendants of Abraham there would be One who would be the glorious redeemer – the Messiah.

What about the blessing of the covenant?

The blessing of the covenant is focused on salvation that comes through the Messiah, the One predicted from the fall, and seen through the line of Abraham's offspring, promised in the Davidic covenant. The blessing is the restoration of fellowship with God restored in Christ (Romans 5:1). For Gentiles it is under the exclusive umbrella of the broader promise to Abraham "through you all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Gen 12:3).

- **Gal. 3:13-14** 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.'

Christ is not just the Savior of Jews, but He is the Savior of people throughout the world (John 3:16). Gentiles are thus participating in the covenant given to Abraham, and the means of fruition of that covenant given in the "New Covenant."

- **Eph 2:12-16** *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **2:13** But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **2:14** For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, **2:15** by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, **2:16** and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

There is one other blessing associated with the Abrahamic Covenant which is conditional not for Abraham's physical descendants, but for all peoples of the earth. This reiterates the special and literal focus God has upon the literal descendants of Abraham.

- **Gen 12: 3** "And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse."

What about the land spoken of in the covenant?

The promise of land coincides with the promise of making Abraham's descendants a great nation, and further coincides with the elaboration of the Davidic Covenant where David's descendant will rule over Israel and all the nations of the world. Beginning in Genesis with the covenant Abraham is exhorted to survey the land in all directions. In addition, Abraham's seed, destined to occupy the land, is described as being as numerous as the dust of the earth.

- **Gen 15:18** On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:
- **Gen 17:8** "I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."
- **Gen 28:14** "Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

The matter of literal fulfillment of the land promise is confirmed by the Scriptures themselves as the children of Israel moved into the promise land. As this was literally fulfilled, and the obvious meaning of the original covenant, how is it the permanence of their dwelling in the promised kingdom is not also literal?

- **Jos 21:43** So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it.

The Abrahamic covenant anticipates Israel ruling as a nation and possessing the land forever. The New Testament declares the Abrahamic covenant immutable (Hebrews 6:13-18). Christ did not deny the reality of the literal kingdom when questioned by His Jewish Apostles at His ascension (Acts 1:6-7). The fulfillment of the reign of Christ literally from the covenant with Abraham is seen in Revelation 20 following His second coming.

- **Rev 20:1-4** Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. **20:2** And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; **20:3** and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. **20:4** Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

The Abrahamic covenant states Israel continuing as an everlasting possession. The possession of the physical land is limited only by the continuance of the present earth itself and may terminate with the destruction of the heavens and the earth at the end of the millennium (depending on the meaning of that destruction). The force of the Hebrew, however, is that Israel will continue to possess the land perpetually. This then is either referring to the continuance of the physical earth in some form, or the transfer of the possession to the New Heavens and earth. It is obvious, that the promised descendants of Israel will continue to rule and reign with Christ eternally in the New Jerusalem shown in Revelation 21-22.