

Genesis 15:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,
This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of
thine own bowels shall be thine heir.

Analysis

And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that s... This passage is part of the Abrahamic narratives which shift from universal human history to God's particular covenant people. The Abraham cycle (Genesis 12-25) demonstrates God's sovereign election, covenant faithfulness, and the development of faith through testing and promise fulfillment.

Central themes include God's unconditional covenant promises (land, descendants, blessing to nations), the call to faith and obedience, the testing of faith through delays and impossibilities, the contrast between divine promises and human schemes, and God's gracious persistence despite human failures. Abraham emerges as the father of faith whose trust in God's promises becomes the model for all believers (Romans 4, Galatians 3, Hebrews 11).

Theologically, these narratives establish:

1. salvation by grace through faith rather than works
2. covenant as God's gracious initiative binding Himself to His people
3. the necessity of patient trust when promises seem impossible
4. the consequences of attempting to fulfill God's promises through human effort
5. the pattern of divine testing producing mature faith.

The Abraham cycle foreshadows Christ as the ultimate seed through whom blessing extends to all nations (Galatians 3:16).

Historical Context

The patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-50) reflect the cultural, social, and legal customs of the ancient Near East during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 BCE). Archaeological discoveries including the Mari tablets, Nuzi tablets, and Egyptian records confirm many details: nomadic pastoralism, covenant-making ceremonies, marriage customs, property laws, and international travel patterns described in Genesis.

The cultural practices reflected include: treaty/covenant forms (Genesis 15), bride-price customs (Genesis 24, 29), inheritance laws favoring firstborn sons (Genesis 25, 27), adoption practices (Genesis 15, 30), levirate-type arrangements (Genesis 38), and Egyptian administrative systems (Genesis 41, 47). These parallels confirm Genesis's historical reliability while showing how God worked within ancient cultural frameworks to accomplish His purposes.

For later Israelites, these narratives established their identity as Abraham's descendants, explained their claim to Canaan, justified their possession of Joseph's bones (Exodus 13:19), and provided models of faith despite imperfection. The patriarchs' failures and God's faithfulness encouraged Israel that covenant relationship depended on God's grace rather than human merit. The movement from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt set the stage for the Exodus and conquest narratives.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What does this passage reveal about God's sovereignty and human responsibility?
2. How does this passage challenge modern cultural assumptions about identity, purpose, or morality?
3. How does this verse fit into the broader biblical story culminating in Christ?

Interlinear Text

וְהִנֵּה ה	דָּבָר	יְהוָה ה	אֵלָיו	לֵאמֹר ר	ל א
H2009	And behold the word	of the LORD	H413	came unto him saying	H3808
	H1697	H3068		H559	
יִירָשָׁבֶּ:	כִּי ה	אִם ר	אֵשֶׁר ר	יֵצֵא א	
This shall not be thine heir	H2088	H3588	H518	H834	but he that shall come forth
H3423					H3318
מִמֶּעַי יָב	ה וְא	יִירָשָׁבֶּ:			
out of thine own bowels	H1931	This shall not be thine heir			
H4578		H3423			

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 17:16 (Parallel theme): And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.

Galatians 4:28 (Parallel theme): Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

2 Samuel 7:12 (Parallel theme): And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

Genesis 21:12 (Parallel theme): 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.

2 Chronicles 32:21 (Word): And the LORD sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the sword.

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