

Genesis 17:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.

Analysis

But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in th... 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

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What theological truths about Covenant Sign (Circumcision) emerge from this passage?
2. What obstacles prevent us from living out the truths presented in this verse?

3. In what ways does this narrative foreshadow or typify aspects of Christ's redemptive work?

Interlinear Text

וְאַתָּה	בְּרִית	יְמִינְךָ	אֶקְרָא	אֶת	יְצַצֵּק	אֶשְׁר	תַּלְדֵּד
H853	But my covenant	will I establish	H854	with Isaac	H834	shall bear	
H1285		H6965		H3327		H3205	

לְבָנָה	שָׁרָה	לִמְעוֹן	דָּעַת	בְּשַׁנְתִּים	הַבָּא	בְּאַחֲרַת
H0	which Sarah	unto thee	at this set time	H2088	year	in the next
H8283		H4150			H8141	H312

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 18:10 (Parallel theme): And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.

Galatians 3:29 (Covenant): And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Hebrews 11:9 (Covenant): By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

Acts 1:7 (Parallel theme): And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

Job 14:13 (Parallel theme): O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!

Exodus 2:24 (Covenant): And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

Exodus 3:6 (Parallel theme): Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

Romans 9:9 (Covenant): For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son.

Genesis 46:1 (Parallel theme): And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beer-sheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac.

Luke 1:55 (Parallel theme): As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

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