

Genesis 21:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

Analysis

And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.... 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

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does this verse deepen our understanding of God's character and His relationship with creation?

2. How does this passage challenge modern cultural assumptions about identity, purpose, or morality?
3. How does understanding Christ as the ultimate fulfillment illuminate this passage's meaning?

Interlinear Text

וְקָרָא	וְאַבְרָהָם	אֶת	שְׁם	בְּנוֹ	יְלֵדָהּ	לִי	אֲשֶׁר	יְלֵדָהּ
called	And Abraham	H853	the name	of his son	bare	H0	H834	bare
H7121	H85		H8034	H1121	H3205			H3205

לִי	שָׁרָה	יִצְחָק:
H0	unto him whom Sarah	to him Isaac
	H8283	H3327

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 17:19 (Parallel theme): 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.

Genesis 21:6 (Parallel theme): And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.

Hebrews 11:18 (Parallel theme): Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

Romans 9:7 (References Abraham): Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.