

Genesis 25:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb,
and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels;
and the one people shall be stronger than the other people;
and the elder shall serve the younger.

Analysis

And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated... 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

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does this verse deepen our understanding of God's character and His relationship with creation?
2. How can we apply the principles from this passage to contemporary challenges in family, work, or church?
3. How does this verse fit into the broader biblical story culminating in Christ?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוָה	לֵה	וּשְׁנֵי	גוֹיִם	בְּבֶטֶן
said	And the LORD	H0	and two manner	nations	are in thy womb
H559	H3068		H8147	H1471	H990
וּשְׁנֵי	מֶלֶךְ	מִמֶּעַיִן	יִפְרָה		
and two manner	and the one people	from thy bowels	shall be separated		
H8147	H3816	H4578	H6504		
מֶלֶךְ	מֶלֶךְ	יִאָּמֵץ	וְיָב	יַעֲבֹד	
and the one people	and the one people	shall be stronger	and the elder	shall serve	
H3816	H3816	H553	H7227	H5647	
צָעִיר:					
the younger					
H6810					

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 27:40 (Parallel theme): And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.

Genesis 27:29 (References Lord): Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.

2 Samuel 8:14 (References Lord): And he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David's servants. And the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.

1 Chronicles 18:13 (References Lord): And he put garrisons in Edom; and all the Edomites became David's servants. Thus the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.

Genesis 24:60 (Parallel theme): And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them.

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.

Numbers 20:14 (Parallel theme): And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us:

Genesis 25:27 (Parallel theme): And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.

Genesis 33:3 (Parallel theme): And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

Genesis 17:4 (Parallel theme): As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.