

Hebrews 11:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

Analysis

Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: This verse heightens the theological tension of God's command. God had explicitly promised that Abraham's covenant seed—the lineage through which Messiah would come and all nations be blessed—would come specifically through Isaac (Genesis 21:12). Not through Ishmael or any other son, but Isaac alone. How then could God command Isaac's death without contradicting His own promise?

The phrase 'in Isaac shall thy seed be called' (en Isaak klēthēsetai soi sperma) established Isaac as the exclusive line of covenant blessing. All God's promises to Abraham—land, descendants like stars and sand, blessing to all nations—depended on Isaac living, marrying, producing offspring. Commanding Isaac's sacrifice created an impossible contradiction for human reason to resolve. Only faith could navigate this paradox.

This demonstrates that God's promises, though absolutely certain, may pass through apparent impossibilities and contradictions that test faith. Abraham faced what seemed like God contradicting Himself. Yet faith trusts God's character and power even when His ways surpass understanding. Reformed theology sees here the doctrine of God's sovereignty over seeming contradictions—He can command what tests us to the utmost while never violating His own nature or promises. The resolution comes through resurrection power (v.19), pointing to Christ who fulfills all promises through death and resurrection.

Historical Context

Genesis 21:12 records God's explicit statement to Abraham about Isaac: 'for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.' This came after Sarah demanded Ishmael's dismissal, when Abraham was distressed about sending away his firstborn son. God reassured Abraham that Isaac alone would carry the covenant line. This makes the command to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22) even more theologically problematic—how could promises be fulfilled through a dead son? The original Hebrew readers, facing persecution and apparent contradiction between God's promises and their suffering, would find profound encouragement in Abraham's faith that trusted God through impossible circumstances.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. When has God's providence in your life seemed to contradict His promises in His Word?
2. How does this passage teach that faith must trust God's character even when circumstances make His promises seem impossible?
3. In what ways does Isaac's unique role as the promised seed point forward to Christ as the ultimate 'seed' through whom all promises are fulfilled?

Interlinear Text

πρὸς ὃν ἐλαλήθη ὅτι Ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι

Of whom it was said That in Isaac be called thy

G4314

G3739

G2980

G3754

G1722

Isaac

G2464

be called

G2564

thy

G4671

σπέρμα

seed

G4690

Additional Cross-References

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

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.

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.

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