

Genesis 18:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,

Analysis

And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to... 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

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does understanding this verse shape our doctrine of humanity, sin, or salvation?
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

וַיַּשְׁאַל	יְהוָה	שֶׁלְשָׁה	אָנָשִׁים	כִּנְצָב
וַיַּרְא	עִינֵּי	וְיַרְאָה	וְיַרְאָה	וְיַרְאָה
וְיַרְאָה	עִינֵּי	וְיַרְאָה	וְיַרְאָה	וְיַרְאָה
וְיַרְאָה	וְיַרְאָה	וְיַרְאָה	וְיַרְאָה	וְיַרְאָה
וְיַרְאָה	וְיַרְאָה	וְיַרְאָה	וְיַרְאָה	וְיַרְאָה

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 13:2 (Parallel theme): Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Genesis 18:22 (Parallel theme): And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.

Genesis 19:1 (Parallel theme): And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;

Genesis 23:7 (Parallel theme): And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth.

Judges 13:3 (Parallel theme): And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.

Genesis 18:16 (Parallel theme): And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way.

Genesis 43:26 (Parallel theme): And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves to him to the earth.

Genesis 44:14 (Parallel theme): And Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house; for he was yet there: and they fell before him on the ground.

Genesis 32:24 (Parallel theme): And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

Genesis 43:28 (Parallel theme): And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive. And they bowed down their heads, and made obeisance.

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