

Genesis 18:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.

Analysis

I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is c... 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 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does this verse contribute to the biblical doctrine of creation, fall, or redemption?
2. How does this passage challenge modern cultural assumptions about identity, purpose, or morality?
3. How does this verse fit into the broader biblical story culminating in Christ?

Interlinear Text

אֲבֵינִי	וְנֵא	וְאֶרְאֶה	הַכְּצַעֲקָתָהּ	הֵבֵא	אֵלַי
I will go down	H4994	now and see	according to the cry	of it which is come	H413
H3381		H7200	H6818	H935	
עָשׂוּ	כָּל־הָ	וְאִם	לֹא	אֲדַעֲהָ:	
whether they have done	altogether	H518	H3808	unto me and if not I will know	
H6213	H3617			H3045	

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 3:8 (Parallel theme): And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Genesis 11:5 (Parallel theme): And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built.

Jeremiah 17:10 (Parallel theme): I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

Exodus 33:5 (Parallel theme): For the LORD had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye are a stiffnecked people: I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee.

Genesis 11:7 (Parallel theme): Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

Deuteronomy 8:2 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

Joshua 22:22 (Parallel theme): The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know; if it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the LORD, (save us not this day,)

Micah 1:3 (Parallel theme): For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth.

Zephaniah 1:12 (Parallel theme): And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil.