

Genesis 19:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.

Analysis

Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) 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 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What does this passage reveal about God's sovereignty and human responsibility?
2. What specific changes in thinking or behavior does this verse call us to make?
3. How does understanding Christ as the ultimate fulfillment illuminate this passage's meaning?

Interlinear Text

בְּאֵת	בַּעֲיר	בָּזָאת	קָרְבָּה	לְבָסָה
H2009	H4994	Behold now this city	H2063	is near
		H5892		H7138
				H5127
מֵצֵעַ רָה וָא	בָּל אֲשֶׁר מֵצֵעַ רָה וָא	אָמַלְטָה בְּאֵת מֵצֵעַ רָה וָא	שְׁמָה בְּאֵת מֵצֵעַ רָה וָא	מֵצֵעַ רָה וָא
unto and it	is a little one	Oh let me escape	H4994	H8033
H1931	H4705	H4422		H3808
				H4705
וְתַחַת יְנֻפְשֵׁי	וְתַחַת יְנֻפְשֵׁי	וְתַחַת יְנֻפְשֵׁי	וְתַחַת יְנֻפְשֵׁי	וְתַחַת יְנֻפְשֵׁי
unto and it	shall live	and my soul		
H1931	H2421	H5315		

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 119:175 (Parallel theme): Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.

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