

Genesis 20:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.

Analysis

And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay... 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 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does understanding this verse shape our doctrine of humanity, sin, or salvation?
2. How does this passage challenge modern cultural assumptions about identity, purpose, or morality?
3. What connections can we trace from this verse to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

Interlinear Text

אָמַרְתִּי	וְאַבְרָהָם	כִּי	אָמַרְתִּי	בְּקֵץ	אֵין	תִּירָאָה
Because I thought	And Abraham	H3588	Because I thought	Surely	H369	the fear
H559	H85		H559	H7535		H3374
אֱלֹהֵי	בַּמָּקוֹם	הַזֶּה	וְהָרְגוּ	עָלַי	דְּבַר	
of God	is not in this place	H2088	and they will slay me	H5921	sake	
H430	H4725		H2026		H1697	
אֶשְׁתִּי:						
for my wife's						
H802						

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 16:6 (Parallel theme): By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.

Genesis 12:12 (Parallel theme): Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive.

Genesis 26:7 (Parallel theme): And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon.

Genesis 42:18 (References God): And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God:

Proverbs 2:5 (References God): Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

Proverbs 1:7 (Parallel theme): The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Nehemiah 5:15 (References God): But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God.

Romans 3:18 (References God): There is no fear of God before their eyes.

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