

Genesis 20:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children.

Analysis

So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they b... 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

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What theological truths about Abraham's Deception emerge from this passage?
2. What obstacles prevent us from living out the truths presented in this verse?

3. How does understanding Christ as the ultimate fulfillment illuminate this passage's meaning?

Interlinear Text

אָתָּה יְהוָה יְמִינֵּךְ	וַיַּתְפִּלְתָּהּ אֶל אֱלֹהִים	וַיְלַבֵּשׁ אֶלְבִּינָה	וְאֶת-בְּגָדָה	וְאֶת-בְּגָדָה	וְאֶת-בְּגָדָה
prayed	So Abraham	H413	and God	healed	and God

אַבִּימְלָךְ	H853	וְאֶת אִשָּׁתָּו	וְאֶת אַשְׁתָּו	וְאֶמְהָתָו	וְאֶמְהָתָו	וְלֹדוֹן
Abimelech		and his wife	and his maid-servants	and they bare		

Additional Cross-References

James 5:16 (Prayer): Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Philippians 4:6 (Prayer): Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

Isaiah 45:11 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.

Proverbs 15:8 (Prayer): The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

Matthew 21:22 (Prayer): And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

Matthew 7:7 (Parallel theme): Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

Genesis 29:31 (Parallel theme): And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.

Genesis 20:7 (Prayer): Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine.

1 Thessalonians 5:25 (Prayer): Brethren, pray for us.

Ezra 6:10 (Prayer): That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.