

Genesis 26:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife: and how saidst thou, She is my sister? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her.

Analysis

And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife: and how saidst thou, She ... This passage belongs to the Jacob narratives which demonstrate God's sovereign election overriding human merit and the transformation of a deceiver into Israel, the father of the twelve tribes. The Jacob cycle shows how divine purposes advance through flawed individuals whom God graciously transforms.

Key themes include God's sovereign choice ("the older shall serve the younger"), the consequences of deception and family dysfunction, exile and return patterns, wrestling with God leading to blessing, and covenant renewal across generations. Jacob's character development from manipulative deceiver to mature patriarch demonstrates sanctification's lifelong process.

Theologically significant aspects include:

1. divine election based on grace not merit (Romans 9:10-13)
2. God's faithfulness to covenant promises despite human unfaithfulness
3. discipline as evidence of divine love and means of transformation
4. generational patterns of sin requiring divine intervention to break
5. prayer and wrestling with God as legitimate expressions of faith.

Jacob's limp after wrestling God symbolizes how divine encounters leave permanent marks, transforming our approach to life and dependence on God rather than our own cunning.

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

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does this verse deepen our understanding of God's character and His relationship with creation?
2. What obstacles prevent us from living out the truths presented in this verse?
3. How does this verse fit into the broader biblical story culminating in Christ?

Interlinear Text

וְקָרָא א	אָבִימֶלֶךְ לְךָ	יִצְחָק ק	אִמַּי רְתִי	אֶרְאֶה	הִנֵּה ה
called	And Abimelech	And Isaac	and how saidst	Behold of a surety	H2009
H7121	H40	H3327	H559	H389	
אֲשֶׁתְּךָ	הָוָא	וְאֵי יְיָ	אִמַּי רְתִי	אָחִי תִי	הָוָא
she is thy wife	H1931	H349	and how saidst	thou She is my sister	H1931
H802			H559	H269	
אִמַּי רְתִי	אֵלָיו	יִצְחָק ק	כִּי	אִמַּי רְתִי	פֶּן
and how saidst	H413	And Isaac	H3588	and how saidst	H6435
H559		H3327		H559	
					אִמַּי וְת
					Lest I die
					H4191
					H5921