

Genesis 28:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

Analysis

And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, an... 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

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does understanding this verse shape our doctrine of humanity, sin, or salvation?
2. How can we apply the principles from this passage to contemporary challenges in family, work, or church?
3. How does understanding Christ as the ultimate fulfillment illuminate this passage's meaning?

Interlinear Text

וְנֹכַח אֵל	וַיֹּאמֶר	מֶה	וְנֹכַח אֵל	הַמָּקוֹם זֶה	הֲזֶה ה	אֵין
And he was afraid	and said	H4100	And he was afraid	is this place	H2088	H369
H3372	H559		H3372	H4725		
אֵם	כִּי	זֶה	בֵּית	אֱלֹהִים	זֶה ה	
H2088	H3588	H518	this is none other but the house	of God	H2088	
			H1004	H430		
שַׁעַר	הַשָּׁמַיִם:					
and this is the gate	of heaven					
H8179	H8064					

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 5:1 (References God): Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.

Exodus 3:6 (References God): Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

1 Timothy 3:15 (References God): But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Luke 2:9 (Parallel theme): And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

Genesis 28:22 (References God): And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.

2 Chronicles 5:14 (References God): So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.

Judges 13:22 (References God): And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.

Revelation 1:17 (Parallel theme): And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

1 Peter 4:17 (References God): For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

Hebrews 10:21 (References God): And having an high priest over the house of God;