

Genesis 28:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on,

Analysis

And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and w... 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

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does understanding this verse shape our doctrine of humanity, sin, or salvation?
2. What specific changes in thinking or behavior does this verse call us to make?
3. In what ways does this narrative foreshadow or typify aspects of Christ's redemptive work?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּדְבַּר	וַיִּשְׁמַע	וַיִּשְׁמַע	וַיִּשְׁמַע	וַיִּשְׁמַע	וַיִּשְׁמַע	וַיִּשְׁמַע
vowed	And Jacob	a vow	saying		If God	
H5087	H3290	H5088	H559	H518	H430	H5978
וְשָׁמַע	וְשָׁמַע	וְשָׁמַע	וְשָׁמַע	וְשָׁמַע	וְשָׁמַע	וְשָׁמַע
will be with me and will keep me	in this way					that I go
H8104	H1870					H1980
וְנָתַן	וְנָתַן	וְנָתַן	וְנָתַן	וְנָתַן	וְנָתַן	וְנָתַן
and will give		me bread	to eat	and raiment	to put on	
H5414	H0	H3899	H398	H899	H3847	

Additional Cross-References

1 Timothy 6:8 (Parallel theme): And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

2 Samuel 15:8 (Parallel theme): For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD.

John 1:16 (Parallel theme): And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

Psalms 66:13 (Parallel theme): I will go into thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay thee my vows,

Genesis 31:13 (References God): I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.

Isaiah 19:21 (Parallel theme): And the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and perform it.

Acts 18:18 (Parallel theme): And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

Psalms 116:14 (Parallel theme): I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.

Psalms 61:8 (Parallel theme): So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.

Psalms 116:18 (Parallel theme): I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people,