

Genesis 28:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife.

Analysis

Then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael A... 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

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does this verse deepen our understanding of God's character and His relationship with creation?
2. How can we apply the principles from this passage to contemporary challenges in family, work, or church?
3. In what ways does this narrative foreshadow or typify aspects of Christ's redemptive work?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּלְךְ	עֵשָׂו	אֶל	יִשְׁמָעֵאל	וַיִּקַּח	אֶת	מַחֲלָתוֹ
H1980	Esau	H413	of Ishmael	and took	H853	which he had Mahalath
	H6215		H3458	H3947		H4258
בֵּת	יִשְׁמָעֵאל	בֶּן	אַבְרָהָם	אָח	וְנָבִי	עַל
the daughter	of Ishmael	son	Abraham's	the sister	of Nebajoth	H5921
H1323	H3458	H1121	H85	H269	H5032	
לְאִשָּׁה:	ל	לְאִשָּׁה:				
to be his wife	H0	to be his wife				
H802		H802				

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 36:3 (Parallel theme): And Bashemath Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebajoth.

Genesis 36:18 (Parallel theme): And these are the sons of Aholibamah Esau's wife; duke Jeush, duke Jaalam, duke Korah: these were the dukes that came of Aholibamah the daughter of Anah, Esau's wife.

Genesis 36:13 (Parallel theme): And these are the sons of Reuel; Nahath, and Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah: these were the sons of Bashemath Esau's wife.

Genesis 26:34 (Parallel theme): And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite:

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