

Genesis 30:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her.

Analysis

And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her... 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

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does this passage reveal about God's sovereignty and human responsibility?
2. What obstacles prevent us from living out the truths presented in this verse?

3. What connections can we trace from this verse to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

Interlinear Text

וַתֵּן	ל	אֶת	בִּלְהָה	שְׁפָחָתָהּ	לְאִשָּׁהּ	וַיָּבֹא	אֶל	יִשְׂרָאֵל
And she gave	H0	H853	him Bilhah	her handmaid	to wife	went in	H413	
H5414			H1090	H8198	H802	H935		
וַיָּקָם יַעֲקֹב:								
and Jacob								
H3290								

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 25:6 (Parallel theme): But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.

Genesis 25:1 (Parallel theme): Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah.

Genesis 33:2 (Parallel theme): And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost.

Genesis 22:24 (Parallel theme): And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, she bare also Tebah, and Gaham, and Thahash, and Maachah.

Genesis 35:22 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:

Genesis 21:10 (Parallel theme): Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.

2 Samuel 12:11 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes,

and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.

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