

Genesis 35:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.

Analysis

And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God,... 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 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What theological truths about Return to Bethel emerge from this passage?
2. What specific changes in thinking or behavior does this verse call us to make?
3. How does understanding Christ as the ultimate fulfillment illuminate this passage's meaning?

Interlinear Text

אָמַר	לֵי	בֵּית	עַל	הַ	קָם	יַעֲקֹב	בְּ	אֶל	אֱלֹהִים	וַיֹּ	אָמַר	
said	And God	H413	unto Jacob	H3290	Arise	H6965	go up	H0	to Bethel	H1008		
H559	H430						H5927					
וַיֵּשֶׁב	וְ	שׁ	מְ	שׁ	מְ	תִּשְׁעֶשֶׁת	מִזְבֵּחַ	מִזְבֵּחַ	לְאָלֹהִים	הַ	פִּרְאָה	
and dwell	and	H8033	there and make	H6213	H8033	make	H4196	an altar	unto God	that appeared	H7200	H3427
H3427									H410			
אַל יָבֹא		בְּ	בְּרַכָּה		מִפְנֵי	מִפְנֵי	וְ	עַשׂ	אֶחָיוֹ:			
H413	unto thee when thou fleddest		from the face	H1272	H6440	of Esau	H6215	thy brother	H251			

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 31:13 (Resurrection): 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.

Hosea 12:4 (Parallel theme): Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Beth-el, and there he spake with us;

Psalms 91:15 (Parallel theme): He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.

Genesis 31:3 (Parallel theme): And the LORD said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.

Genesis 35:7 (Sacrifice): And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.

Deuteronomy 32:36 (Parallel theme): For the LORD shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left.

Psalms 47:4 (Parallel theme): He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved. Selah.

Exodus 2:15 (Parallel theme): Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well.

Genesis 12:8 (Sacrifice): And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

Genesis 16:8 (Parallel theme): And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.