

Genesis 35:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.

Analysis

And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which... 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

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does understanding this verse shape our doctrine of humanity, sin, or salvation?
2. How should this truth about Isaac's Death shape our daily decisions and priorities?
3. What connections can we trace from this verse to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

Interlinear Text

אֲשֶׁר	הנִּכְרֶת	אֱלֹהִים	כָּל	אֶת	יַעֲקֹב	בְּ	עַמְּךָ	אֶל	יְהֹוָה	בְּ	יְהֹוָה	אֲלֵיכֶם
And they gave	H413	and Jacob		H853		H3605		gods		all the strange		H834
H5414		H3290				H430		H5236				
בְּיַד מַ		אֶת			יַעֲקֹב יְמִ		בְּנִצְמָמָת	רָ	אֲשֶׁר			
which were in their hand	H3027		H853		and all their earrings			H834				
					H5141							
בְּאַזְנֵיכֶם		וַיַּעֲקֹב בְּ	אֶתְכֶם	וַיַּעֲמֹד	בְּ	אַתֶּם	תִּחְתַּח	הַ	כָּאֵל	הַ		
which were in their ears	H241	hid	H853		and Jacob		H8478		them under the oak		H424	
		H2934			H3290							
עַמְּךָ רָ		שְׁכָם:										
H834	H5973	which was by Shechem		H7927								

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 30:22 (Parallel theme): Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstrual cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence.

Exodus 32:20 (Parallel theme): And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it.

Deuteronomy 7:25 (References God): The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an abomination to the LORD thy God.

Judges 9:6 (Parallel theme): And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem.

Isaiah 2:20 (Parallel theme): In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats;

Hosea 2:13 (Parallel theme): And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgat me, saith the LORD.