

Genesis 37:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.

Analysis

And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him... This passage is part of the Joseph narrative, a masterfully crafted account demonstrating God's sovereign providence working through human choices and circumstances to accomplish His redemptive purposes. The Joseph cycle shows how God transforms evil intentions into instruments of salvation.

Central themes include divine providence orchestrating events toward redemptive ends, the testing and refinement of character through suffering and success, forgiveness overcoming betrayal and injustice, and the preservation of God's covenant people through famine. Joseph's rise from slavery to second-in-command of Egypt illustrates how God exalts the humble and uses seeming disasters for ultimate good.

Theologically, these chapters reveal:

1. God's meticulous sovereignty over all events, even evil human actions
2. suffering as preparation for future service rather than punishment
3. forgiveness as reflecting divine character and enabling reconciliation
4. God's covenant faithfulness across generations ensuring the survival and blessing of His people
5. how present suffering gains meaning when viewed from the perspective of God's larger purposes.

Joseph's words "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (50:20) epitomize biblical theodicy and providence.

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

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does this verse deepen our understanding of God's character and His relationship with creation?
2. How does this passage challenge modern cultural assumptions about identity, purpose, or morality?
3. How does this passage point forward to Christ and the gospel of redemption?

Interlinear Text

וְיָרָא אֵת	מִרְחָה קָרְבָּן	וְבָאָה כִּמְעָד	בְּלֹא בְּלֹא
And when they saw	him afar off	even before he came near	
H7200	H853	H2962	H7126
אֲלֵיכֶם	יְתַנְכֵל אֵת	לְבַמִּתְּהָרֵךְ	
H413	H5230	H853	H4191
unto them they conspired		against him to slay	

Additional Cross-References

Acts 23:12 (Parallel theme): And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

Psalms 37:12 (Parallel theme): The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth.

Psalms 37:32 (Parallel theme): The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him.

Mark 14:1 (Parallel theme): After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death.

1 Samuel 19:1 (Parallel theme): And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David.

Psalms 31:13 (Parallel theme): For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life.

John 11:53 (Parallel theme): Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.

Mark 12:7 (Parallel theme): But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be our's.

Matthew 21:38 (Parallel theme): But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

Matthew 27:1 (Parallel theme): When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: