

Genesis 37:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.

Analysis

These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with hi... 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

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. What specific changes in thinking or behavior does this verse call us to make?
3. What connections can we trace from this verse to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵלֶּה תַּלְדֵּות יְהוָה יְהוָשָׁעַ בְּנֵי שְׁבָעַ
 H428 These are the generations of Jacob Joseph and with the sons H7651
 H8435 H3290 H3130 H1121
 עָשָׂר הַשָּׁנָה רְעֵה אֶת אֶחָיו בָּאָזְרָן
 being seventeen years was feeding with his brethren the flock
 H6240 H8141 H1961 H7462 H854 H251 H6629
 בְּנֵי וְאֶת בְּלִקְבָּד בְּנֵי וְאֶת בְּנֵי
 H1931 and the lad H854 and with the sons of Bilhah H854 and with the sons H1121
 H5288 H1121 H1090 H1121
 אֶל בְּעֵה דְּבָתִ מ אֶת יְהוָשָׁעַ בְּנֵי זִלְפָה
 of Zilpah wives his father's brought Joseph report their evil H413
 H2153 H802 H1 H935 H3130 H853 H1681 H7451
 אֶבְיוֹקָם:
 his father's
 H1

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 11:18 (Parallel theme): For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.

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:

1 Corinthians 5:1 (Parallel theme): It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

1 Corinthians 1:11 (Parallel theme): For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

John 7:7 (Evil): The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.

Genesis 30:4 (Parallel theme): And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her.

Genesis 10:1 (Parallel theme): Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood.

Genesis 30:9 (Parallel theme): When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob to wife.